

FILM SPECTATOR

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IN THIS NUMBER

CLARENCE BROWN MAKES A PICTURE WHICH
PROMPTS US TO COMMENT ON AT LENGTH

ERICH POMMER'S PLACE IN PICTURES, AND OUR
SYSTEM'S REFUSAL TO RECOGNIZE GENIUS

WILLIAM K. HOWARD GIVES US A PRODUCTION THAT
WILL ATTRACT WIDESPREAD INTEREST

SOME THINGS THAT COLLEEN MOORE'S LATEST
TEACHES US ABOUT MAKING PICTURES

ELINOR GLYN WRITES A STORY WHICH REVEALS THAT
SHE HAS A SENSE OF HUMOR

HOOT GIBSON HAS A PREVIEW UPON WHICH WE MAKE
SOME RAMBLING REMARKS

WILL THIS YEAR PRODUCE THE MAN WHO WILL MAKE
PICTURES SENSIBLY?

FLESH AND THE DEVIL
BARBED WIRE
FAUST
WHITE GOLD

TWINKLETOES
IT
THE DENVER DUDE
THE CANADIAN

LETTERS FROM READERS

THE YOUTHFUL CRITIC

THE FILM SPECTATOR

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THINK about motion pictures.

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Coming Up

Old Ironsides will be reviewed in the next Spectator. Also we will endeavor in that issue to uplift the screen by pointing out lessons to be learned from *The Flaming Frontier*, *The Night of Love*, the latest Banky-Colman production; *New York, Kid Brother*, *Everybody's Acting*, *The Snarl of Hate*, *Summer Bachelors*, and any others that defy us by coming to the neighborhood houses which we patronize. If any reckless producer invites us to a preview, we will include it, too.

* * *

Clarence Brown Scores a Triumph

NOW that *Flesh and Blood* is being shown here there will be a general doffing of hats to Clarence Brown. It is one of M.-G.-M.'s program pictures which was kept within its cost and shooting schedules, but it is the only picture that ever played four weeks at the Capitol, New York. Judging solely by my conception of motion picture art I think it is the best thing that Metro ever gave us. It will not have the appeal of *The Big Parade* or *The Fire Brigade*, but is a better piece of work than either of them. It is a director's picture. Give Ben Glazer credit for having written a splendid story, and Greta Garbo and Jack Gilbert credit for doing the best work of their careers, and still the major honors for the superb production go to the director. When Brown gave us *The Goose Woman* he demonstrated his right to be considered among the greatest American directors. *Flesh and the Devil* raises him still higher. Judging him by both pictures, I could offer no argument in rebuttal if you proclaimed him the greatest. *Flesh and the Devil* is as colorful and elaborate as *The Goose Woman* is drab and sordid. Both are highly emotional and in both the emotions are handled with the sureness and sincerity of a master. Brown is a good director and is going to be a better one because he is not hampered by any of the motion picture traditions beyond which the imaginations of most of our other directors can not soar. He simply tells his story, with the writing of which he always has a

great deal to do. Something of his training as an engineer is reflected in the systematic efficiency with which he moves from scene to scene in a story that flickers by without a superfluous foot. But his understanding of human emotions is something that can not be learned at an institution that specializes in producing engineers. In depicting them on the screen he ignores the factor of safety that enters into bridge building. Each emotion is strong enough only to carry its share of the burden of the story. There is no waste energy, not a gesture more than is necessary to make a perfect scene. But there is vigor in Brown's repression, the vigor of a red blood that is pulsing deeply, the surface ruffled only enough to indicate the storm within. It is the kind of direction that makes actors great. More than any other American director, Clarence Brown invests a picture with the proper atmosphere to match the mood of the story. In *Flesh and the Devil* he displays a pictorial sense comparable only with the qualities in Pommer's pictures that made them popular here. The production is extraordinary for the beauty of its scenes and the businesslike connection between the scenes and the action. Although his characters belong to the titled, wealthy class they are not forever tripping over servants. Occasionally you see a maid or a butler who is necessary to maintain the atmosphere of the story or assist the action, but never anything to cover up a lapse in the story or to provide scenic effects that bear no relation to the story. Brown's production in this picture is like the exquisite work of a master book-binder whose are registers on the cover the mood of the story which the book contains.

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Clarence Scorns Movie Traditions

BEFORE dismissing the externals of *Flesh and the Devil* I would like to pay my respects to Clarence Brown's proficiency in handling ensemble shots. Greta Garbo and Gilbert meet in a park without disturbing the park activity. It is staged splendidly. Strollers pass between the characters and the camera, a policeman saunters by, a perambulator almost runs over Gilbert's toes, in the dim background two saddle horses cross the scene, a man leads a dog across the foreground—dozens of things happen that make you feel that the whole thing is real, but not one thing that distracts your attention from the lovers on the bench. Anyone who has been in a European railway station lives the experience over again in this picture. Brown is not too busy with his drama in the foreground to overlook the background in which a porter touches his hat to the station master, a man hails a cab and a woman collects her luggage. It is easy enough to put action in an ensemble shot, but Brown puts it in a manner that is convincing. He applies his engineering efficiency to the story itself. He does not bother us with non-essentials. The opening sequence takes place in a military institution of some sort in which Gilbert and Lars Hanson are something or other in uniforms. We are not told what the institution is, what the young fellows are doing in it, or even what city or country it is in—and we don't care, for such details have nothing to do with the story. But you know and I know that almost any other director in the business would have opened with a title reading something like this: "In the Bimberger School of Infantry, where German gentlemen are made

into German officers, and situated on the River Rhine, three miles east of Hootsiedoodle, there are two young men, one a son of a Scotch Presbyterian minister, and the other the offspring of a union of a hand-organ grinder and his second cousin."—all of which would have nothing to do with the story, but would be shown in deference to movie traditions. As I said, Brown scoffs at traditions. He puts his characters on a train and never tells us where they are going, or why. It makes no difference, for we go with them and soon learn that they are going home. When he wishes to introduce John Smith he has a character speaking the title, "It's a fine day, John Smith," and we know who John Smith is. But despite the dearth of information that Clarence gives us there is nothing obscure about the story. Everything we need to know to help to an understanding of it is spread before us. It moves by quickly, each scene the logical sequel to the preceding one. There are not a great many titles, as there is no occasion for them, for Brown has the ability to tell a story with action, and to compose beautiful scenes with which to tell it. The photography in *Flesh and the Devil* is a splendid example of the high degree of art that can be reached with the camera, and Brown was fortunate in having such an artist as William Daniels to turn the crank. The art direction of Cedric Gibbons and Frederick Hope enriched the production until it is one of the most satisfying to the discriminating eye that ever have been produced in an American studio.

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"Flesh and Devil" Great Work of Art

BECAUSE I put the leading of a dog across a scene before a reference to the emotions with which *Flesh and the Devil* deals, I do not wish to convey the impression that I consider their relative importance in that order. I merely dismissed the obvious features of the picture before approaching its soul. This picture is great, not for the qualities I have mentioned, but for those I yet have to deal with. It is an inspiring story of a great friendship, a friendship which ennobles two young men and is the biggest thing in their lives. Gradually the screen is learning things it should have known years ago. *Stella Dallas* teaches it that mother love had been a neglected subject. *Beau Geste* teaches it that brotherly love is a good film theme. *Flesh and the Devil* teaches it that there is a good story in friendship. There are a lot of other good themes lying around unused, but one by one they will be clubbed into the heads of producers. Brown never forgets that his picture is the story of a friendship. A passionate love story runs through it, but we never lose sight of the friendship. There is a glorious ending—too good to tell you what it is. But it gives one renewed faith in the future of the magnificent art to the advancement of which *The Spectator* is dedicated and the activities of so many of its readers devoted. The ending is logical, not "happy." Under Brown's direction the acting of the principals is sincere and convincing. Jack Gilbert returns from exile in Africa to find that the woman whom he loves passionately has married his friend. He takes the blow standing up—a magnificent example of acting. He has a smile and a handclasp for his friend. He is true to their youthful pact. But a time comes when he has stood all he can. He lets go, and we have some more acting, equally notable, but greatly different. Greta Garbo

has a similar outburst, human, logical, revealing her powers as they seldom have been revealed. Lars Hanson, always repressed, always the master of his emotions, gives a performance that more firmly fixes his place among real screen actors. George Fawcett, that brilliant veteran who never fails us, gains further laurels in this picture, and Eugenie Besserer is a sympathetic and appealing mother, duplicating the success she achieved in *The Fire Brigade*. Barbara Kent, a winsome young miss, whom I can not recall having seen before, rises to the heights demanded by several strong scenes. *Flesh and the Devil* has some of the best love scenes yet seen on the screen. Clarence Brown has the good taste to stage such scenes in places that provide the lovers with some seclusion. Henry King in *Barbara Worth* has Vilma Banky going into Ronald Colman's arms in full view of a multitude, which not only is bad taste, but is poor drama, for it robs love of the delicious thrill that is accentuated by the privacy that envelops it. There is but one witness to but one of the love scenes between Miss Garbo and Gilbert. Unfortunately for them, but essential to the story, is the fact that the witness is Greta's husband. But I can not go on enumerating the virtues of *Flesh and the Devil*. It would occupy too much space. But I must not overlook a word of praise for Marion Ainslee's titles, which stick strictly to the job of telling the story, even if at times they wander from the path of correct punctuation. Considering the picture as a whole I hereby give it a fixed place on my list of ten best pictures for 1927. It is too much to hope that there will be ten others that would displace it. Months ago I recorded in *The Spectator* my respect for Clarence Brown as a director. That respect has deepened. Only a truly great director could elevate a program picture to one of the greatest works of art ever produced in a motion picture studio. My hat is off to the man who did it.

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Erich Pommer and American Pictures

THE thoughtful person contemplating motion pictures must arrive at the conclusion that the most interesting person connected with them is Erich Pommer. It is Pommer's relation to pictures, not his personality, that makes him interesting. For all I know to the contrary he may have an interesting personality, but it is his works, not the man, that we are interested in. While he was director-general of UFA that organization turned out scores of pictures that had so little merit that they could not be shown at a profit in this country. The company produced pictures so rapidly that it was not humanly possible for Pommer to give personal attention to all of them. At least such is my conclusion after reading in an English paper a review of UFA activities during the last year that Pommer was with it. However, while he was picture-making in Europe Pommer gave personal attention to every detail of the production of six pictures. We have seen five of them in this country—*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Last Laugh*, *Variety*, *Waltz Dream*, and *Faust*. The sixth, *Metropolis*, a million dollar production, we are to see. Five different directors made these pictures, but the whole half dozen reflect but one mind, that of Pommer, establishing it as the greatest picture mind in the world. His five pictures that have been shown here have given us a new conception of screen art. Con-

sidered as a group, they are the greatest contribution ever made to the advancement of that art. From the flamboyant treatment of the passionate story in *Variety*, the theatrical use of the camera, consistent with the telling of a theatrical story; to the lofty and inspired treatment of the Faust story, rising to sublime heights to match the majesty of the theme, covers an extraordinary range of expression and fixes the place of the screen among the high arts. Pommer came to Hollywood to make pictures for Famous Players-Lasky, a company in a position to have given him all the intellectual and technical co-operation that a combing of the world would bring to light. Hampered as he was in Europe by the necessity of keeping within the financial restrictions of his organization, he made a record unequalled by any other producer in the world; unhampered in this country he could rise to greater heights and lend still further dignity to screen art. Will he be unhampered? In the answer to that question lies the reason why Erich Pommer is the most interesting man in pictures. That he was hampered is the only possible construction to put on his break with Paramount.

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Can Our System Assimilate Genius?

MOTION pictures are organized in this country so that it is difficult for a definite personality to register itself. Many times in *The Spectator* I have recorded my high opinion of B. P. Schulberg as a producer, and certainly he is one of the finest fellows in the business. He it is under whom Pommer was working in this country. I know of no American who has a better picture mind than Schulberg, but he is part of the American system of making pictures, a multiple mind system that robs productions of all individuality. An American system that does not permit an American unhampered expression on the screen scarcely will readjust itself to grant the privilege to a foreigner. Several times I have charged the industry with an inability to learn by experience. I believe Pommer's success abroad will mean nothing to Hollywood. He was induced to come here on account of his extraordinary achievements in Germany under a certain system, and was expected to duplicate those achievements under another system that was forced on him. His presence here puts on trial our method of making pictures. Can this method assimilate a real artist and allow such artist to express himself? I doubt it. If Pommer's American-made pictures do not possess the merit of those he made in Germany it will be our system's fault, for the six pictures that I enumerated in the preceding paragraph remove any doubt of his ability. We have several one-picture men in this country, but none who has turned out six which have arrested the attention of the world. Pommer has supervised two pictures here, *Hotel Imperial* and *Barbed Wire*, both starring Pola Negri. The former is the better motion picture, but the latter will have greater audience appeal. While both will rank among the foremost pictures of the year, neither comes up to the standard set by *The Last Laugh*, *Variety* or *Faust*. They do not possess the same artistic appeal as the German-made ones and will not be regarded as such valuable contributions to screen art. But in the two, in which he had the assistance of such capable directors as Mortiz Stiller and Rowland Lee, Pommer reveals to us

again the brilliancy of Pola Negri as an actress. That much he has done, something that American directors without his supervision have been unable to do in the years that have elapsed between the arrivals of Pola and Pommer in this country. He also has made his two pictures notable for the pictorial excellence that characterized those which he made abroad. That both of them would have been better pictures if he had been allowed the same freedom he enjoyed in Germany seems a reasonable presumption.

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One That Pommer Made in Hollywood

BARBED WIRE is a succession of beautiful scenes, exquisite works of art such as Pommer always uses in telling his stories. Bert Glennon's camera work reaches the high degree of excellence he achieved in *Hotel Imperial*. The lighting is particularly effective and Rowland Lee is to be commended for his sense of composition. The direction all the way through is masterly. One sequence is particularly notable for its depth of human appeal. It opens with a shot showing the German and French soldiers fraternizing in *No Man's Land*, the spell of the Christmas spirit blotting out animosities engendered by the war. Later we see how the prison camp celebrates Christmas, the whole sequence being handled in an impressive manner. The story of *Barbed Wire* is an adaptation by Jules Furthman of Hall Caine's "A Woman of Knockelov". The original is a story of an English girl falling in love with a German incarcerated in a prison camp on the Isle of Man. The picture places the camp in France and makes the girl French, keeping Pola Negri more in character, as there is nothing about her to suggest the English. She gives a remarkable performance, responding nobly to Lee's direction. Pola is a superb actress. The story sags in the middle, probably due more to faulty editing than to any weakness in the story itself. There is nothing the matter with the scenes, for there is not a poorly presented sequence in the whole production, but for perhaps a reel there is little to hold the interest of an audience which derives its entertainment from the story and none from beautiful scenes capably directed. Undoubtedly a great deal of thought was expended on the ending, and while I did not like it, I can not suggest how it could have been improved. Inherently the ending has great strength. Her neighbors are incensed at the French girl for declaring her love for the German, splendidly played by Clive Brook, who is ideal in the part, and are on the point of driving her from home when her brother, blinded in the war, appears. The physically sightless man is the only one who can see the folly of the senseless antagonism, and he makes a long speech, broken into several titles, that are good propaganda, but poor motion picture entertainment. It makes the ending drag. But the picture as a whole is a splendid example of screen art, notwithstanding its few deficiencies, and demonstrates the wisdom of Paramount's action in securing the great picture mind of Erich Pommer to supervise its foreign players, and the folly of not retaining him to continue it. Clyde Cooke plays a comedy party in a manner that makes it one of the big features of the picture. Those splendid artists, Claude Gillingwater and Gustav von Seyffertitz contribute perfect performances, and Einar Hanson, as Pola's brother, adds to the

merits of the picture. There is one extraordinary shot showing the dead traversing a cloudy thoroughfare that is a monument to the technical genius of Roy Pomeroy.

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One That Pommer Made in Germany

FAUST is the work of an unrestrained Pommer, working under a system which he dominated. It is a magnificent achievement, with a depth of spirituality which American producers seldom attain. It is too intellectual to match Barbed Wire in audience appeal, consequently under the industry's dollar standard it will be rated as inferior to that picture, but if I were in the producing business I would rather have to my credit one Faust than a dozen Barbed Wires. A picture like Faust adds to the hardships of a reviewer's life. It makes our ordinary run of pictures appear so trivial. To consider it and Twinkletoes as products of the same method of expression is to put the Colleen Moore picture under a heavy load. I have seen quite a number of pictures since I viewed Faust and I looked at all of them with the eyes that beheld the majesty of the German production, while still under the spell of that extraordinary artistic triumph and with the new conception of the screen that it gave me. It has created within me a feeling of discontent with our factory-made product that might have entertained me if I had not seen Faust. But Faust itself is not without blemish. Like Barbed Wire, it sags in the middle, but when the real tragedy of its love story begins to develop, it sweeps onward to a great ending in a manner that earns my unbounded respect for the picture mind responsible for it. It is a simple love story that might have had Hollywood for its locale, or Amsterdam or Calcutta, but it has the glamour of an old-time setting, the romance of clothes that used to be worn, story-book architecture and scenery that an artist dreamed. The major fault of Faust is that it is done too well. There is so much of it that it over-feeds the aesthetic sense and dulls the power of appreciation. I believe the ideal way to see it would be to make two trips, viewing half of it one night and half the next. It would tend to better digestion of its merits. Like all the Pommer pictures, including the two he has made here, it reveals an extraordinary blending of beauty and drama. There is not a shot in Faust that is not a wonderful example of composition, lighting and photography used effectively to maintain the atmos-

phere of the production and to advance the story. I can not recall the exact words in the main title which characterize Faust as a poem in pictures, or something to that effect. That is exactly what it is—an exquisite piece of poetry, related on the screen by its master poet, and to enjoy it to the uttermost you must so regard it. It is more than a drama of a great love, more than a story of supreme emotion. It is a product of the newest art that unfolds to us the limitless possibilities of that art when its expression is left to the free exercise of a brain that understands more than any other the extent of the possibilities.

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"Faust" Has Great Intellectual Appeal

FAUST was directed by F. W. Murnau, who directed The Last Laugh also. In this country we know of nothing notable he has done without Pommer's supervision. He is making a picture in Hollywood for Fox and not until it is released can we measure his real ability as a director. All we know of his work here thus far is that he already has exceeded his shooting schedule by a couple of months or so and is proceeding cautiously. We know that Du Pont, made famous as the director of Variety, failed deplorably in his first effort to make a picture in Hollywood without Pommer's co-operation. The most notable work of five different foreign directors being under Pommer's supervision makes logical the conclusion that the chief credit for the notable work must belong to him. I credit him with the virtues of Faust as I have no way of knowing how much Murnau contributed to them. M.-G.-M., in Americanizing Faust, failed to give Pommer any credit for it, his name not appearing on the screen. Even Paramount, which had him under contract, omits giving him screen credit for supervising Barbed Wire. The immensity of the letters that record Rowland Lee's name as its director perhaps left no room for the mention of Pommer as supervisor. It is called a Lee-Pommer production, without stating what Pommer had to do with it, an oversight that did not embrace the art director, photographer and others. Probably nothing smaller, nothing betraying the characteristic meanness of some of our picture minds, than Metro's deliberate slighting of Pommer's contribution to Faust, ever has disgraced an art. But when we compare Pommer with those responsible for the slight it becomes laughable. If some of the people who control American pictures had a sense of humor they would die laughing at themselves. Emil Jannings' characterization in The Last Laugh was not such as to develop all the sympathy the part might have called forth, but in Faust he gives a magnificent performance that is comparable with the best work of our American actors. Camila Horn is the Marguerite of our dreams—young, blonde and beautiful, so unlike the hefty sopranos who generally sing the part. The Faust of Gustav Eckmann is in every way adequate. But it is not the acting that makes Faust a great picture. It is the extraordinary breadth of the conception, the amazing production given it and the intellectual treatment of the theme. Even those who think the story drags can not fail to be impressed by the artistic qualities of the picture, and its appearance on American screens will have a tendency to make us demand similar excellence in the works of our own studios. That Paramount realized this

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was indicated by its action in securing Pommer, Jannings and other foreigners, but that under the American system Pommer would be able to duplicate here the triumphs he achieved abroad I never for a moment believed. Art, to achieve its ultimate, must be the free expression of its creator, and the wisdom of allowing an intellect to express itself freely on the screen is something that we not yet have learned in this country. When we grow big enough to learn it Pommer may give us an American-made Faust.

* * *

Screen's Progress Helped by Germans

WHATEVER advancement has been made in the technic, lighting and photographing of motion pictures during the past ten years has been the work of Germans. Only a few of their pictures have been outstanding successes in this country because they devoted most of their attention to the science of picture-making, and little to the entertainment value of their stories. Meanwhile in this country the reverse has been the rule. We give all our attention to stories and so little to the method of presenting them that all of them are alike. Pommer came to this country two years ago, went through our studios, noted our way of doing things and then returned home and so improved upon our methods that he has sent us the best half dozen pictures standing to the credit of any man in the world. In our studios we have people capable of doing everything that Pommer has done, but they are not allowed to do it and our pictures are kept down to the dead level of the capacity of our supervisors, not more than two or three of whom know anything about pictures. In any other line of human endeavor the coming of such a master as Pommer would have been welcomed cordially by those whose co-worker he was to be. He would have received the heartiest cooperation of those who were in a position to profit from contact with him or from observation of the results he accomplished. But the motion picture business is like none other on earth. When Pommer arrived he was not allowed to do the things he was brought over here to do. There is nothing else to deduce from his split with Paramount. I know nothing of the inside story of the disagreement. All I know is what I read in the papers, statements by both the studio and Pommer to the effect that they parted with the most cordial relations still existing between them, giving us occasion to thank the man who thought up the new meaning for the word "applesauce". I have no personal interest in Pommer, the individual. But I am interested in Pommer, the artist, because he is the biggest artist that pictures have produced. It was unthinkable that he should turn his back on Hollywood and by returning to Germany proclaim to the world that this community, that prides itself on being the film capital of the world, has no place within its borders for the greatest film mind in the world. It is to the credit of the industry that Pommer no sooner had left Paramount than he was deluged with offers of other alliances.

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Every day or so I read that some film player, who is a subscriber to The Spectator, has left for the East to make a picture. I would like all of them to know that it is no trouble for us to forward their Spectators to them while they are away.

Has All the Things That Screen Can't Do

ANY producer will give you a list of the things you can not do on the screen. The list is getting shorter. Stella Dallas, removed mother love from among the things the public simply won't stand for; Beau Geste blotted out brotherly love and Flesh and the Devil will wipe friendship off the list. Among the remaining things that you can not do is the assembling of three men and a woman on a dust-laden ranch in Arizona during a drought, and in three interiors and a few drab exteriors work out a story that will interest anyone. Any producer will tell you that that can't be done and he would be apt to shoot any author who submitted such a story. However, William K. Howard tackled such a story and has made a picture that will create a lot of talk. He has done all the impossible things, but if White Gold is not a success it will surprise me. Briefly, this is the story: Kenneth Thompson marries Jetta Goudal and takes her to his father's ranch. The father, George Nichols, hates her; George Bancroft comes along as a ranch hand; the drought continues; the springs on Nichol's rocking chair creak; there is dust on everything; nerves are taut; Bancroft enters Jetta's room at night when the husband is absent; she shoots him; the father, knowing his son will believe him and not his wife, says that he shot Bancroft, having discovered him in Jetta's room. Jetta is silent. Saddened because her husband did not have enough faith in her to make it unnecessary for her to defend herself, she leaves the ranch—and that is the end of the story. To make a picture out of it was a brave thing for Bill Howard to attempt, and he scores a signal success even though he does not get all the possibilities out of the story. Perhaps Garrett Fort and Tay Garnett did not write everything into the story that might have been written in. They did not make the most of the real menace in the story—the drought, nor did they dramatize the rain when the drought ends. But I saw the picture in a projection-room and I believe some things were done to it after I viewed it, so I had better be careful in criticizing it for lacking something it may now contain. White Gold is a picture that is a distinct contribution to the science of making pictures. Howard takes impossible scenes and situations and makes a thoroughly intelligent picture out of them. It is a picture that no student of the screen can afford to miss. It reflects the greatest credit on Howard. He is one of our youngest directors, but he is going to be heard from. He is too much in love with his work to fail at it. He has intelligence and daring, and the daring director is the only one who will do things of value to the screen as an art. Howard even was daring enough to direct Jetta Goudal—once.

* * *

"White Gold" Was A Bold Undertaking

WHITE GOLD was a bold undertaking because it is a story solely of emotions, its characters restricted to one spot, and with no action in it. The biggest scene is one showing Jetta, Nichols and Thompson sitting at a table. Howard directs them with rare intelligence. They scarcely move, holding your interest only by the expressions on their faces, with the help of an occasional title when one is necessary to assist in the

interpretation of their thoughts. In such a scene, of course, close-ups are necessary, but Howard does not overdo them as nearly all directors do. *White Gold* would have been a still better picture if there had been a more accommodating actress in the only feminine role. Jetta Goudal has ability, but she exercises it only in close-ups. I do not know what is going to happen to her when all the directors on the De Mille lot in turn have directed her, for none of them will take her on a second time. She has a perverted sense of her importance in the screen world, or such a queer conception of her obligations to her employers that no picture in which she appears is as good as it would be if some sensible person of even less ability played her part. Her ability not being outstanding, I can not understand why any producer bothers with her. I expect to be invited to a grand celebration on the De Mille lot to mark the termination of her contract. The acting honors in *White Gold* belong to George Nichols, the veteran character actor. His hatred for his son's bride is unreasonable; he is morose and taciturn, and continually rocks in his squeaky chair in a maddening manner. Nichols gives a splendid interpretation of such a character, being particularly effective in one long close-up in which he registers his fear of looking his daughter-in-law in the eye. Young Thompson is an acceptable leading man, being sincere and convincing. George Bancroft handles his part with his usual thoroughness, but in his last sequence would have looked better if he had not used the greasy make-up similar to that which makes McLaglen and Lowe look almost disgusting in *What Price Glory?* I suppose this repulsive make-up means something to somebody, but to me it is only something that spoils a scene. Bancroft starts off on an amorous adventure with his face almost dripping with 'grease, a queer fancy for the wooing of someone else's bride. On aesthetic as well as moral grounds Jetta had a valid excuse for shooting him. Clyde Cook adds some fine comedy touches to the picture. Anton Grot, the art director, dresses the production in a garb that matches its mood, and John W. Krafft and John Farrow contribute a set of satisfactory titles. The production was supervised by C. Gardner Sullivan, edited by Jack Dennis and photographed by Lucien Andriott. Marion Orth's continuity was a fine piece of work. *White Gold* is somewhat revolutionary and is done so well that it suggests a brilliant future for Bill Howard. Unless I miss my guess he is a young man who will go a long way.

* * *

"Twinkletoes" Is Shy on Twinkles

TWINKLETOES was well underway when I dropped in on it. The first scene I saw was one in which Warner Oland was attempting to get the best of Colleen Moore. I did not know what it was all about, but I was impressed by the acting of Colleen in the struggle which followed. She lets herself go and expresses fear and hate with all the passion a Negri could put into a scene. It is a bit good enough for the most dramatic production. Oland, of course, is fine in it—a habit he has. Then followed a glimpse of that splendid character actor, Lucien Littlefield, and in a few more feet came the end. Plenty of action, capable direction, good lighting and photography, a fine cast—and yet I had heard that *Twinkletoes* was a very poor picture. What I had seen

of it certainly gave me the impression that it was well worth while, and I awaited the front end of it with confidence. When finally I had seen all of it I discovered that all its virtues are in its last reel. Taken as a whole it is an extremely tiresome picture, worse than anything else in which Colleen has appeared. The locale being the Limehouse district in London, it is as foreign to us as the scenes in which *Faust* is played. There is as much story in it as there is in *Variety* or *The Waltz Dream*. First National has money enough to secure the best of everything for a Colleen Moore production, and Colleen can act quite well enough to keep up her end in any company. Why, then, did John McCormick fail to give us a picture that would measure up with Pommer's best? The answer is easy. Pommer applies intellect to his pictures and *Twinkletoes* is a product of established movie methods. No picture that was the result of deep thinking could contain so many senseless close-ups as *Twinkletoes* contains. They were quite enough in themselves to spoil any production. Whoever was responsible for them does not understand the fundamentals of making pictures, nor has he any sense of drama. The author wrote a scene describing the manner in which the girl confesses her love for the man. She mounts the steps leading to her home while the man stands at the bottom and urges her to come down to him. She goes a little way, stops, turns, descends a few steps, mounts again, hesitates, then slowly descends and goes into his arms. Directed intelligently it could have been a strong scene. It should have been shown in a long shot without a camera change, the man at the bottom of the stairs, the girl at the top, both at all times in sight of the audience, which is interested only in whether she is going to him and not at all in the expressions on their faces. The important feature of the scene is the relation of the characters to one another. The moment there is a cut to a close-up of either of them this relationship is lost sight of. But the entire scene is shown in close-ups, demonstrating that the makers of the picture did not understand it. This lack of intelligence in the use of close-ups is in evidence throughout the entire production. On every hand you hear Colleen's acting criticized on the score that she smirks and grins too much. The criticism is just, but the fault is not hers. In each of her pictures are dozens of close-ups of her for which there is no excuse whatever. They are lessening her box office value by giving the public a wrong impression of her acting ability. But I suppose we will continue to have them.

* * *

Suffers From a Great Many Ills

A PICTURE made by people who do not know what close-ups are for can not be expected to reveal intelligence in the handling of its less obvious features. *Twinkletoes* has many other weaknesses. There are perhaps a dozen scenes which have nothing to do with the story, and having no virtues in themselves serve only to retard it. The only reason for them that I could see was to provide footage into which could be cut some more close-ups of Colleen. The characterizations of Oland and Littlefield were perfect, but poor Tully Marshall, as Colleen's father, was made to behave as no father on earth ever behaved. Every time he and Colleen got within clinching distance they grabbed one another and hugged

and kissed. I have two daughters for whom I have as much paternal love as a screen father need be endowed with, but if both of them together pawed me half as much as Colleen paws Tully I would take such drastic measures to prevent it that I might become liable to a charge of cruelty. Neither fathers nor daughters act as both are made to do in *Twinkletoes*, direction that makes a large contribution to the general unreality of the picture. A street fight attracts a crowd which does not surround the combatants as an ordinary street crowd would. It leaves one side open for the camera. Charles Brabin, who directed the picture, might ask me how the camera could record the fight if the crowd surrounded it. By having an energetic spectator make the crowd describe a large circle, which could be planted in a long shot, moving the camera within the circle to get the medium shots of the fight. But, in any event, any scene that can not be shown on the screen exactly as it would be in real life never should be photographed. There is a similar lapse in the direction of a theatre sequence. Colleen is doing her stuff on the stage and the excited chorus girls assemble in the wings to watch her. They do not cluster as they would in real life. They stand in parallel lines, to permit a shot being taken between them to register their interest and to show Colleen on the stage in the distance. With the camera stationed in an opposite wing Colleen could have been shown in the foreground and the girls grouped naturally in the background. As the picture has it, it is a striking example of unintelligent direction. The whole theatre sequence is ridiculous. We see all that *Twinkletoes* does on the stage. She dances very nicely, quite well enough to please a tough Limehouse audience, but not well enough to arouse the tremendous and sustained enthusiasm that the audience registers. The picture audience, having seen her act, knows this. And it has nothing to do with the story. Her success or failure as a dancer is not what the story is about. It is all very silly, serving only as an excuse for several more close-ups of Colleen smiling. It may interest Brabin and McCormick to know that men in Limehouse audiences keep their hats on in music halls. In the picture they take them off. And if *Twinkletoes* is such a favorite that men break up the show clamoring for her appearance, how do you explain a title in a previous sequence which says that often there is little in her house to eat? A headliner who is three-sheeted throughout the neighborhood ought to draw down enough to beat Old Mother Hubbard in a cupboard contest. I have pointed out quite enough to show why *Twinkletoes* is not a notable picture. And it might have been. In itself it has everything necessary to the making of a picture out of the ordinary. It falls down because it did not have intelligent treatment.

* * *

Elinor Glyn Picks Winner

WHEN a group of four or five people enters a room it is not unusual that one of them attracts more attention than all the others. All may conduct themselves alike, they may look pretty much alike, wearing clothes of equal attractiveness, but one of them will draw the eyes of the majority of lookers-on. He or she is the one with that strange quality, personality. It is something that no one acquires consciously. It remained for Elinor Glyn to put it on the screen, to dramatize it,

even though undramatically. Perhaps she will do it over again in something bigger and stronger than *It*, which is a delightful comedy, but which only scratches the surface of the possibilities of the theme. Madame Glyn in *It* deals with but one variation of the theme, personality with a sex appeal attachment. At least, I suppose that that is what her "it" is. She seems to have perplexed the world as much as Dr. Einstein did with his theory of relativity. While we don't know what the two of them discovered, we are quite ready to believe in the existence of the things they discovered. But there is a bigger "it" than a shopgirl's which lands her a rich husband. There is the "it" of the man of power, who can do tremendous things by sheer force of his personality. A strong drama could be based on it, and I hope Madame Glyn undertakes to write it, for she should not allow anyone else to exploit her discovery. When she first thought of the story for the picture *It* she told it to Ben Schulberg. He thought it a great idea and told her to go ahead. He assigned Clarence Badger to direct it. Badger took to the idea enthusiastically. So far, so good. Then a peculiar thing arose. No one else on the Paramount lot could see any merit in the idea, which, in essence, was to make a motion picture about the thing motion picture artists must have to make motion pictures successful—personality. The selling end of the organization in New York thought it a nutty idea and opposed the making of such a picture. But Madame Glyn, Schulberg and Badger stuck stubbornly to their conviction that they had a winner, and it has turned out that they were right. It is interesting chiefly for revealing to us a new Elinor Glyn, one with an amusing taste in comedy and who can entertain us for the full length of a feature picture that does not have a single tiger skin in it. It adds strength to my argument in the last *Spectator* that Madame Glyn has a picture mind and that the screen is a better medium of expression for her than literature. We always will get better pictures from writers who have learned screen technic than from screen technicians who try to write.

* * *

Nothing in "It" to Make You Mad

DEALING with the subject of authors in pictures in the last issue, I said that when authors supervised the making of pictures based on their stories we would have no more pictures that would make us mad, even though there might be many that we do not like. Such pictures would be free from all the absurdities that are so much in evidence now. It is a picture supervised by the writer of its story and there is nothing in it that affronts the intelligence. Even those who do not like it can not charge it with being illogical, silly or senseless, ills which afflict so many screen offerings. But I can not imagine anyone not liking it. The story has been told many times before on the screen, but this time it has been motivated differently and the whole thing has been treated so intelligently that it is delightful entertainment. Of course there are the usual senseless close-ups, which can be attributed to the editing and not to the story or the direction. Tony Moreno, William Austin and the captain of a yacht stand close together on deck and talk. It is shown entirely in close-ups, losing all its pictorial value. A group of three smartly dressed men on the deck of a trim yacht gives the cameraman an opportunity to pro-

duce an artistic scene, but if he made such a shot it was discarded in favor of some close-ups that mean nothing whatever. In another scene two women call on Tony in his office and to bring the three of them within a medium shot Clarence Badger packs them together on the side of the desk where Tony sits and where visitors to his office would not go. They would face him across the desk. You will notice in any picture that Erich Pommer makes the characters are grouped naturally and the camera has to shoot the scene any way it can. Most American directors do their grouping to accommodate the camera, which is why we have so many things that look just like motion pictures, instead of the bits of real life that Pommer gives us. In all the rest of his direction Badger shows that he entered completely into the spirit of the story and he makes a good picture out of it. Clara Bow, of course, is captivating. I can imagine no one else in the part. Moreno never did better in a light role. The beach sequence, in which he and Clara have the time of their lives on the amusement devices, goes over big because the two of them seem really to be enjoying themselves. Badger realized that joy is contagious and directed the sequence in a manner that makes the audience get as much fun out of it as the characters did. But as Clara and Tony played themselves, I believe the acting honors of *It* belong to William Austin, who played a character part. He has done well in a great many bits without previously having given a casting director the idea that he could do well a lot of bits in one picture. In *It* he has a big part—in effect a lot of bits—and adds immeasurably to the entertainment value of the picture. It is to be hoped that hereafter he will be recognized as a comedian to be featured. It was quite an inspiration on the part of someone to have Madame Glyn herself appear in a sequence. It is a touch which in itself will have a lot to do with the success of the picture. There must be many millions of people in the world curious about the appearance of so famous a woman and *It* will satisfy their curiosity. I wonder if she has “it”.

* * *

“The Denver Dude” Is Rather a Dud

HOOT Gibson's latest is *The Denver Dude*, a Western farce that has precious little to recommend it except Hoot's own good natured personality. No doubt it will appeal to his regular list of customers and perhaps that is all that it is supposed to do. But just why do they make so many Westerns that by no possibility can appeal to people of intelligence? And, if a Western, why not maintain the Western atmosphere? In this picture Blanche Mahaffey, a very dainty little girl, strolls around a corral in gowns that would grace the terrace at Monte Carlo, and lives in a ranch house whose interior would be ostentatious in a Newport cottage. She and her mother, or aunt, or somebody, dress for a barbecue as elaborately as if they were going to be presented at court. I grant that it is good movie stuff to show beautiful gowns, but to make the roasting of an ox the reason for superlative dolling up is a weird bit of movie license. Also we have a Boston man wearing a silk hat on the ranch. And an old man who, a title explains, was born in this country to save the fare over, wears kilts and talks a brand of Scotch that will make it unsafe to show the picture in Scotland. The title writer's conception of

Scotch dialect is something extraordinary. The inviolable rule that you must have the love element in a motion picture is satisfied in *The Denver Dude* with a ready-made romance that required no working up whatever. It just is, although the two parties to it hadn't met since they were children. There is one quaint bit of comedy. A woman looking for her husband is told that he is dead, a funny idea in itself, but it becomes screaming when she is told that he broke his leg and had to be shot. Another good idea in a movie is to have the hero protect the reputation of the heroine. Although there is not the slightest reason why Hoot should not tell the father that the daughter opened the safe and may know what happened to the missing money, he stubbornly refuses to do so, entailing upon himself the necessity of fleeing before the sheriff gets there. Blanche opened the safe to get her necklace for the barbecue, for no refined Western girl would outrage ranch conventions by appearing at a big barbecue without a necklace, but a shot in the barbecue sequence shows her not only minus the necklace, but also without the diamonds and pearls she previously had worn when she went to inspect a bull. Some bandits shoot a bus driver in this picture. Personally, I hold the belief that shooting bus drivers should come under the heading of light diversion, but the statutes look at it differently and when one is shot a sheriff, or a policeman, or someone, sooner or later hears about it and becomes agitated. Nothing like that happens in this picture. But when Bob McKim steals some money and they think Hoot did it, a sheriff is dug up pronto. If *The Denver Dude* had not contained these few faults, and if a different story had been written for it, it might have been a pretty good picture. However, it is no worse than the ordinary run of Westerns and if you do not apply the rule of reason to it you may get some fun out of it. But if you do apply the rule of reason you will get a devil of a lot more, but not the same kind. (Hoot told me that if he liked my review of *The Denver Dude* he'd subscribe for *The Spectator*.)

* * *

Hoot Gibson and Douglas Fairbanks

OF COURSE, my feelings for *The Denver Dude* may have been influenced somewhat by the presence of someone in the seat behind me who chewed gum with vulgar ostentation and disgusting and audible persistency. But I do not believe that even without the mushy obligato I could have witnessed with approval a scene showing Hoot and his father meeting after a separation of five years. Although an early scene registers the father's pride in his son, the two come together near the end of the picture and do not exchange a handclasp or a word. They do not even look at one another. When Reeves Eason directed the scene he simply forgot that a reunion was due, but how did it get beyond the projection-room? One of the weird things about Westerns is the habit producers have of making them so silly that they can not appeal to anyone who thinks. Such pictures have spoiled one of the most profitable fields that producers could exploit. Western pictures could be shown to-day in the biggest first-run houses and would be recognized as among the screen headliners if they had not degenerated into the wholly impossible things that masquerade under their name. They have the whole out-

doors as a background, the glorious scenery that our West can boast, red blooded men and women, elemental emotions, deeds of daring, great riding, great thrills—everything that a motion picture audience could ask for. They could provide the kind of entertainment that would thrill the moron and intrigue the intelligentsia, enjoying the widest appeal of any class of pictures, if only brains were exercised in their making. Charlie Rogers recognizes this, and, with Ken Maynard as star, is turning out Westerns with common sense stories. The *Overland Stage* is entertaining enough to please any audience on earth. I told Douglas Fairbanks the other day that a real Western should be his next picture. It was after a luncheon at which Dr. Hugo Reisenfeldt and I had as our opponents in an argument Doug, Joe Schenk and Fred Niblo, and I did not have sufficient eloquence left to uphold vigorously my contention about the Western, but I since have thought of a dozen reasons I might have advanced to support my theory that Doug, in a real, old-time Western, done with the care for detail that characterizes all his work and on the magnitude that his recent productions have achieved; with a sensible story, having both gripping drama and real comedy, and scenery that would give the production a sweep as broad as our plains, could give the public a picture that not only would make him another fortune and add to his reputation, but also would restore to Westerns in general the dignity that used to be theirs and should be still. Doug draws the smartest audiences wherever pictures are shown. Can't you imagine the thrill a Piccadilly audience would get out of a Western presented as he would present it? And, anyway, what is there left for Doug to do? He has done about everything in set building that the human mind can conceive. Now he should use the sets that nature built.

* * *

Tom Meighan Sinks Just a Little Deeper

ONE of *The Spectator's* rules of conduct is to be fair. In my review of *The Popular Sin* in the last issue I said that apparently the Paramount Long Island studio had no new ideas in lighting. I wish to make a retraction. It has. In *The Canadian*, Tommy Meighan's latest, there is an extraordinary exhibition of lighting. Most of the scenes are laid in two rooms in a farm house. The rooms are devoid of any lamps or lighting fixtures, yet at night are lighted brilliantly. The hidden system throws a brilliant light on Tom's face, no matter which way he is facing, and also shines refulgently on the top of his head, at the same time throwing his full length shadow on the wall. The sun does even better than that during the day sequences. Simultaneously it throws two shadows of Tom, each on a different wall. I take off my hat to the studio. It has done something in the lighting line that even God can't do. There are some snappy close-ups in *The Canadian*. There is one of Tom smoking his pipe, followed by one of a girl washing dishes, followed by one of Tom smoking his pipe, followed by one of a girl washing dishes, followed by one of Tom smoking his pipe, followed by one of a girl washing dishes, followed by one of Tom finishing his smoke, followed by one of the girl finishing the dishes. They are terribly exciting. You can see the smoke rising from Tom's pipe and the girl's hands moving in the dishpan. In one of them Tom appears to be thinking. The girl has a tough

year on a farm, but not tough enough to affect her high-heeled slippers, silk stockings or marcel. A firm of London lawyers, which signs its name after "Yours very truly," an expression never used by a firm of London lawyers, sends her a check for five hundred pounds to the distant Canadian farm. The check is not "crossed", as is the habit in England, and, anyway, is something that lawyers in London would not be idiots enough to send to Canada, when drawn on a London bank, for no one in Canada would cash it. The *London Daily Mail* subscribed for *The Spectator* the other day and forwarded a check drawn on J. P. Morgan & Co., New York. The lawyers in the picture would have sent exchange. But the girl starts off for the railway station with no cash, with nothing but the check with which to buy her ticket. I think I have seen a more hopelessly impossible picture than *The Canadian*, but not during the last fifteen years.

* * *

Heart Interest in Catalina Contest

WHEN he was introducing George Young at *Grauman's Egyptian* on the occasion of the presentation of the \$25,000 check to the channel swim winner, Fred Niblo referred to the young Canadian's mother and everyone applauded, including the man sitting directly in front of me. Three years ago he was a big man in one studio and now is a big man in another. It was just about three years ago that I submitted to him a story based on the love that existed between a mother in poor circumstances and her eighteen-year-old son. He was good enough to read it himself and afterwards he told me at length just why it would not do at all. The love that exists between a mother and her boy was not screen material, he said. It was something in which an audience could not be made interested. He proved everything he said—and the other night he applauded when Fred Niblo referred to the love that existed between seventeen-year-old George Young and his mother. All the world is applauding the same thing. It is the mother that makes the Young story dramatic. Do you imagine that if Norman Ross, the famous athlete, had won the race the thrill of it would have circled the globe? By no means. It would have been only a sporting event. But because this unknown youngster impressed the world with the sincerity of his love for his mother, and because the newspapers carried stories about the mother worrying about the possibility of her boy catching cold, George Young becomes the hero of the outstanding story of the century. This bears out what I said in a previous *Spectator*, that the public wants some real, old fashioned sentiment and that picture producers would be wise if they made some effort to cater to that want. But they will not. As a whole, the industry is incapable of learning anything. The reason for the amazing interest in the victor of the channel swim can be discovered only by a process of reasoning beyond the mental capacity of the industry to perform. The executive who sat in front of me applauded, but if you tried to sell him a story based on the sentiment he applauded he would pull gross figures on you to prove that by no possibility could a picture made from such a story prove to be a box office winner. It's sex stuff that the public wants, my boy, with a leaning towards war stories and spectacles. As for a mother's love for a kid, a boy who has no sex appeal—it would be a flop.

When Mr. John Doe Produces Pictures

PERHAPS this year will bring forth the Sensible Producer. There is such an opening for him that it is an economic certainty that he will appear sometime, for where there is money to be made someone ultimately turns up and makes it. Let us suppose that John Doe is the individual who becomes the Sensible Producer and makes all the millions that can be made by producing sensibly. Mr. Doe must have a bank roll to start him in business, just as he would have to have if he wanted to start in any other business. He should have \$400,000 to assure the finishing of four \$100,000 pictures during the first year. Of course, he should get the negative cost back on the first picture before he finishes the second, but he is playing safer if he can make at least four pictures without depending upon the revenue from the first, as he thereby would be more independent in making his releasing arrangements. His organization to start with will be composed of himself, the best production man he can find, and a girl to tell people that the other two are in conference. The first addition will be a story editor who will dig up a story that he can sell to Doe and the production man. No difficulty will be experienced in finding stories, as the best ones now being written are being rejected by the big producers, who do not understand what a good story is. The story selected will be put into perfect shape for shooting, no matter how long it takes. A director who can shoot that kind of picture will be selected. He will be given an opportunity to make suggestions regarding the story, but after his suggestions are considered and acted upon, and the changes, if any, incorporated in the script, he will shoot the story exactly as it is written. The cast will be selected with full regard for acting and none for big names. John Doe's productions will have real actors in them, instead of famous people. The story will be held to be supreme. Shooting will proceed smoothly and the morning an actor's name appears on the pay roll that actor goes to work, and he will work until he is through and paid off. Meanwhile the story department will have the second story in hand in order that shooting it may begin soon enough after the first picture is finished to keep the mechanical force employed, for it is during his first year that John Doe must build up his organization to handle the four or five units he later will have at work. Cutting and titling will be done intelligently, and in course of time John Doe will have in a box a picture that was produced sensibly, which means that he will have a picture that will please audiences everywhere. It will have been made exactly as George Loane Tucker made *The Miracle Man*.

* * *

He Will Do All the Impossible Things

AND, like *The Miracle Man*, John Doe's first picture will have no big names connected with it. There will be nothing in it but entertainment. John will take it to New York, where ninety-nine film salesmen will turn it down because Mary and Doug and Jack Barrymore are not in the cast, but the hundredth will see that it is a motion picture, and Doe will get a release that will return him the negative cost. The picture will not make a great deal of money, for as yet "A John Doe



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Production" will mean nothing to the public. After a while along will come number two, "Another John Doe Production," which will do better than the first; and the third will do so well that exhibitors will ask about the other two. By the time the fourth is released exhibitors and the public will know that "Another John Doe Production" means something, and unless I miss my bet Mr. Doe then can take his pick of the big releases. And he will get his big release on his own terms, the most important of which will be his stipulations that he will make his pictures absolutely to suit himself and that they are to be featured as John Doe Productions, not as starring vehicles for any artists. The public wants new faces and will get used to looking for them in the Doe pictures. John Doe's name in electric lights will mean human stories, honest productions, fine acting and sympathetic direction. It will not take the public long to discover this. Mr. Doe will make some actors famous, as Tucker did with *The Miracle Man*, and other producers will think they are out-smarting him by grabbing these actors on long term contracts, but John will smile and continue to pay reasonable salaries and advertise the fact that you must see his pictures if you wish to become acquainted with stars in the making. While these other producers are paying enormous salaries to hold the stars that John made, he will be making others and will be adding to the value of his greatest asset—"Another John Doe Production." He will have no directors nor actors under contract and will be independent of them. He will not pretend to give the public anything but the honest entertainment it likes and it will not take the public long to learn it. In his Western pictures he will not have six-cylinder revolvers that will fire more than six shots without reloading; in his dog pictures he will present dogs as dogs and not as actors; he will know that the public loves old men and will feature them, and he will make millions of dollars by doing all the other things that our present producers say are impossible. He will have his titles written and punctuated in a manner that will not offend intelligent people. I am not claiming credit for originality in suggesting this method of making pictures. Everything I suggest was done by George Loane Tucker when he made *The Miracle Man*, the greatest money-maker in the history of the screen—something that was made possible because, when he made it, Tucker thought only of the picture and not of money.

* * *

Pictures Will Last Long Time

JOHN DOE'S pictures will retain their drawing power for a long time, for they will deal with fundamental human emotions which do not change. He will not insert shots of someone doing the "Black Bottom" for he will know that within a few months a picture containing such scenes will be old fashioned. He will not present any of the temporary flights of fancy in which the public happens at the time to be indulging. His first picture will be as up-to-date when the tenth is issued, as it was when released, consequently the popularity of his later pictures will bring into renewed circulation the first he made, evening up the earnings of each of them. John Doe will be a hard-headed business man with sense enough to know that he knows nothing about making pictures, but with an ability to build up an organization of people who do. And

he will leave such people alone. He will have the pick of the picture brains of Hollywood, for there is not a single brainy person connected with the screen who is happy in his present position. There is not one capable person on the pay roll of a Hollywood studio who is giving his employers the best there is in him, because half his creative energy is wasted in doing battle with the conditions that surround him. The Sensible Producer will come as a God-send to the suppressed brains of the picture world. He will offer to authors and directors the first opportunities they have had to work for a man who will listen to them. Never in the history of any industry was the stage so set for the entry of a newcomer who can build a tremendous success on the failures of those who have preceded him. The present method of conducting the business is such as would appall a man with any knowledge of business efficiency. But to date the industry has accomplished one good thing. It has given an opportunity to a large number of people to gain a grasp of picture essentials even though it has refused to let these people express themselves. It is among these people that John Doe will recruit his organization, and there will not be another producer in the business whose pictures will have half the audience appeal that the pictures made by him will possess. There is nothing problematic about the advent of John Doe. The opportunity that is presented to him is too glittering to be overlooked.

* * *

Poor Material to Inspire a Staff

UNQUESTIONABLY one of the greatest of the many ills from which the motion picture industry suffers is self-complacency. If it were less satisfied with itself the public might be more satisfied with it. There comes to me in the mail "Greater Paramount Pictures," an ably edited and attractively printed house organ which Monte Katterjohn turns out for Famous. It lists seventeen pictures as composing the 1926 honor roll. I do not understand the system of scoring, as *Beau Geste*, perhaps the finest picture Paramount ever produced, is not on the list. Ten of the seventeen were made out here. Behind *the Front and We're in the Navy Now* head the list in that order. Both are inexpressibly silly comedies, totally lacking in cleverness. *The Grand Duchess* and *the Waiter* comes next. *Mal St. Clair* gave this picture very able direction. *Let's Get Married* is number four. The only thing I can remember about it is that I thought it very trivial. *The Vanishing American*—the only one of the lot I included in my list of the ten best pictures of the year.

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Mantrap—a very good picture. **The Quarterback**—an utterly ridiculous picture. **The Campus Flirt**—I have not seen it. **Padlocked**—very fine. **The Blind Goddess**—very good, notable for its cleverly handled court room scene and the acting of Louise Dresser. **Dancing Mothers**—I have not seen it because my friends told me it was not worth seeing. **A Social Celebrity**—very weak story. **Forlorn River**—a Western that might have been a lot better. **The Palm Beach Girl**—one of the worst pictures of the year as I remember it. **Born to the West**—just another Zane Grey. **Aloma of the South Seas**—full of absurdities. **The Ace of Cads**—I always like Menjou, but there were glaring inconsistencies in this picture. This completes the list that Paramount holds up to its organization as inspiration for this year's output. Would it not have profited the organization more if the house organ had pointed out the weaknesses in all these pictures as things to be avoided in 1927? How are its pictures to be improved if complete satisfaction is expressed officially with all the poor pictures on the list? When Paramount heads its list with **Behind the Front** it is telling its organization that it approves its lack of cleverness. When it honors **The Quarterback** it is telling its writers that no story can be too silly to gain its approval. Instead of giving three cheers for these pictures because they made money, it would get farther if it took them apart to discover why they did not make more.

* * *

There is a reporter in It. You can tell he is a reporter, for he sports a big note book. In newspaper circles that would be no guide to identification, for reporters do not carry note books, big or little. The screen would not characterize a blacksmith always by having him carry a bass fiddle. Why the note book? Merely because it is a screen stupidity that has become standardized. Reporters make notes, on their cuffs, backs of envelopes, or any old place, but never when talking to anyone and never when they need their eyes to see what is going on around them, as was the situation with the reporter in It. If Clarence Badger had wanted to give us a really, truly reporter he would have shown him sauntering out of the scene in which he got his eyefull, and then would have given us a medium shot showing him standing alone somewhere making notes on the edge of a newspaper.

* * *

June Mathis, in discussing original story drawbacks, says, "The necessity of needing a story for a screen production by a certain date crowds producers for time, and the screenwright must rush his work, must put aside his best to give only mediocre results from his hurriedly prepared story." If it will help M.-G.-M. any, I might remind it that a year from now it will need stories to go into production for Norma Shearer, Greta Garbo, Jack Gilbert, Lon Chaney, Ramon Novarro and its other stars. That ought to give it plenty of time to get ready.

* * *

George Marion, Jr. wrote the titles for It. Of course they are of the wisecracking variety. That being exactly the kind of titles that suit the picture Marion's work is excellent and contributes greatly to the entertainment value of the production. One title says that Moreno's father has "gone to Herrin, Illinois, for the shooting." That is a clever and witty title—wisecracking, of course, but exactly matching the spirit of It. I have seen a great

many sets of Marion's wisecracking titles and this was the first set used where it belongs.

* * *

The next time you view a picture note how completely a medium shot presents a scene. Watch how it registers the thoughts of the characters. Notice how clearly you can see the expression on every face on the screen. Then ask the producer of the picture why under the sun he put in so many senseless close-ups. If the direction and editing of a picture be done intelligently there is in no finished production an excuse for more than three or four close-ups. You can measure the degree of the lack of intelligence in a producing organization by the number used in excess of that limit.

* * *

Mickey Neilan and D. W. Griffith add their voices to those of other directors who protest that the foreign picture methods that American audiences are approving were discarded by them years ago as old stuff. There is only one thing about these foreign touches that matters—that audiences enjoy them. If there be anything else this country discarded that foreigners can dig up and entertain us with, let them go at it. I can not see that it adds anything to the luster of American screen art to point out to the public that it discarded something that someone else now uses effectively.

* * *

I see by the papers, where I gather my film news instead of opening all the fat envelopes which the press agents insist upon mailing to me, that Madeline Brandeis is making a two-reel comedy with a cast composed of children of prominent screen players. That's a million-dollar idea. A series of such pictures, provided the stories are good, should prove immensely popular.

* * *

Purely from a publisher's standpoint, it is of considerable interest to us that among an unusually large number of subscriptions to *The Spectator* arriving in one mail there was one from the *London Daily Mail* and one from the *London Evening Standard*, two of the most powerful publications in England.

* * *

Sid Grauman says in an interview that "we may expect war pictures to keep the public favor so long as their treatment is new, the plot fresh and the proper perspective is used in the picturization." Sid, astute showman that he is, utters a great truth. As long as pictures about war live up to his specifications they will be popular. So will pictures about anything else.

LANCASTER & GARDNER

ARTISTS' REPRESENTATIVES



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VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

WE ARE ADMONISHED

Dear Welford Beaton:

I read The Spectator from cover to cover. But I am getting annoyed with you. If you are not very careful, you are going to degenerate into a nagger and a harper. It isn't nice for clever gentlemen to nag or harp or carp. Not often. You are, for instance, so pleased with yourself about discovering titles and their punctuation crimes, that you drag them into every paragraph. You are right about them, but persistent self-righteousness isn't nice. It is a good subject to touch upon in teasing vein about, say, twice a year.

I worship bright male minds—but they mustn't nag.

Yours co-preachily,

ALMA WHITAKER.

Dear Alma Whitaker:

How could you? Because you are a writer I charged you no more for a year's subscription to The Spectator than I do actors—and you chide me! You have a boy. Being a regular boy, let us assume that he refuses to wash behind his ears. In an effort to mend his ways would you "touch upon it in a teasing vein about, say, twice a year"? You would not! You'd nag the poor little devil until he reformed. Or, if you wouldn't you should, if I am right in my surmise that you think washing behind the ears is a practice that has its good points. If you think you can reform the motion picture business by teasing it every six months, go ahead and try it with your own hefty, logical and brilliant typewriter, but leave me alone to follow my nagging policy. I know I'm not getting anywhere, but I'm having a whole lot of fun.

Yours starchily,

WELFORD BEATON.

"WHAT PRICE" AGAIN

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Your opinions are always stimulating, right or wrong. Of course, to me, they are right when I agree; wrong, when I disagree.

In the Spectator of December 25, you reply to a correspondent who objected to your review of *What Price Glory?* with entertaining sarcasm. I have read that and also your review with interest. You have, however, failed to point out a few weaknesses in the picture which I would like to call to your attention.

I saw the picture with a United States Army major. He had not seen the play, but thought the picture decidedly pacifist propaganda, and that it portrayed far from typical military life and characters. To me the picture was a succession of clever screen touches, but it missed the great moments that made the play.

In the dug-out scene the play showed Captain Flagg caring for his men with iron strength and the tenderness of a mother. That hard-boiled

captain's compassion for his boys, mangled, dying, crazed by useless WAR, tore the hearts out of the audience—left them sobbing with an unforgettable resentment toward war. I believe this scene made the play the success it was. It touched the hearts of the public with poignant grief—as the story of the anguish and compassion of the Christ always has touched them. I believe this made the play a success, in spite of the vulgar scenes, and not because of them. The picture expresses but a faint echo of the power of this scene on the stage, hence the vulgarity, which you so rightly condemn, is about all there is left.

Perhaps it was impossible to express the power of the scene in question in the picture medium, but I am sure some of it was lost through spacing and mechanics. For instance, Flagg had just pulled his men through a string of tragedies, quieted and comforted them, though wounded and suffering, into rest—when the hysterical lieutenant bursts in like a bombshell, shattering the captain's hard-bought morale with his tirade, including the line *What Price Glory?* etc. Now a most vital thing here is the effect of the tirade upon Flagg and the others—the awful reaction of it upon those other broken men—but, in the picture, we see only close-ups of the lieutenant as he shouts his lines, with cuts to his titles, and back each time to the close-up until he subsides.

All criticism aside, surely you will agree that in a time of "rumors of wars" a picture of war that, whatever its sins of commission, has at least a few virtues of omission in that it does no flag-waving and stimulates no desires for military glory, may do less harm than the patriotic variety after all.

ALWAYS AN INTERESTED
READER.

COLOR IN PICTURES

Dear Mr. Beaton:

In your article, "Most Valuable Pictures of the Year", you say you would have placed *The Black Pirate* on your list if Douglas Fairbanks had made it a more fearless experiment in applying color to a feature picture; and that he did it in tones at a time when color photography was advanced far enough to warrant the use of a greater diversity of colors.

After viewing previous pictures that had color, I had always been of the opinion the director had said, "Now, boys, we have an expensive color camera here today, costing so and so. So bring on your colored stuff, and let's get our money's worth." And judging from the results, the prop, men must have over-exerted themselves.

Just previous to the appearance of *The Black Pirate*, I saw a printed statement to the effect that Fairbanks

had it in mind to show how color could be repressed and made more effective by using in one scene only those colors that harmonized; and, going even further, to have only a suggestion of color—in other words, to use shades and tones instead of bold, blazing colors.

Now, in previous pictures no one could keep from exclaiming at the colors. For example, in *The Toll of the Sea* one exclaimed at Anna May Wong's marvelous wedding costume—for it was breath-taking in its livid and living colors—but I saw the picture twice and was so entranced with the colors (in particular, the bold reds) that I almost completely lost track of the action and could return to picking up the story thread only with a jolt.

But color in *The Black Pirate* was quite the opposite. Never did the color intrude on the story. Never once was the action detracted from by the color. Rather was it built up, and supported. And when real color was needed, as for example the blood on the dagger used to regain the ring from the man who had swallowed it, it was a bit of a jolt, here quite permissible, and legitimate in building up the action.

Thank God, with a crew of pirates before the camera almost the entire time, Fairbanks did not attempt (as so easily he could have) something of a mixture between the New Orleans Mardi-Gras, the sample cards sent out by house painters, and the futuristic painting recently sold, which, after being displayed for a couple of days, was found to be the artist's palette, wrapped up by the mistake of his clumsy assistant.

GAYLORD A. WOOD.

WOODEN MOBS

My Dear Welford Beaton:

Your review of *The Scarlet Letter* gave me great satisfaction inasmuch as I have been waiting to read what you would write about it. . . . I have not seen the picture, but I was one of the mob for one day, and you may be interested to know the psychology of the "wooden effect" you mention.

Many of the extras had been on the picture for days, so they knew Seastrom's obsession. . . . I was paid a larger check than the usual person and told to bring my tears with me, so naturally I expected to emote.

It was the scene where the minister tears open his shirt to expose the brand on his chest; I was directly below the platform on which he stood. . . . The acting of Hansen, although he spoke in Swedish, was realistic even if I had not understood Swedish, which, however, I did. . . . I did not act; I was carried away by the sheer force of drama, my jaw dropped, my eyes gazed fascinated at the exposed brand which acknowledged a common guilt with Hester.

Seastrom saw me, though I had made no move except what my face expressed. He shouted at me, "You must not express anything." I stared

at him. "You would not do it," he continued. I was amazed. I talked back (unpardonable sin), I said, "Pardon me, but I would." He whispered to an assistant, and I was placed in the far background, where I could not offend by being human.

Every move was like an automaton. I saw one man called down, because he raised his hat a second too soon. They were all to come off at the same time at a given signal. In point of fact no human beings of any nation on earth would have acted as they were made to act by the Swedish director, Mr. Seastrom.

Among other strange inconsistencies in the picture, which has not been mentioned in the different critiques I have read, is the fact that all the other children wore long dresses of a rough, coarse material, but Hester Prynne's child was dressed in beautiful blue velvet with short skirts. . . . Hester herself, instead of wearing the same kind of bonnet as was worn by all the other women, which were made to cover all their hair, wore one that set for back on her head, showing nearly all her hair.

And have you seen those wonderful pictorial stands? With the hand pointing at Hester, where we see instead of a woman who has suffered, there is the picture of a high school girl waiting to be spanked?

The way Lillian Gish was dressed gave her a brazen attitude towards the people of the village, and lacking in good taste and simplicity, which would have won sympathy. . . . These glaring faults amaze and mystify, and if the so-called "Great Ones" fail to sense them, what hope have we for the rest?

ONE OF THE WOODEN MOB.

A CORRESPONDENT WRITES

To the Editor:

I have just finished reading the copy of The Film Spectator that came this morning and, as usual, I have enjoyed it immensely. But I want to take exception to a statement by Alfred Hust-

wick in an article dealing with the art of motion pictures. He says, "The motion picture, as a medium of expression, has apparently reached the limit of its growth"; and then, "The art of making motion pictures is not going forward". Now, I am not a movie critic, but I believe that pictures are better today than they used to be. If they aren't, why do the picture companies keep building bigger and finer theatres? And why do we get such wonderful pictures as The Big Parade and Variety and Bardelys the Magnificent all in a few months?

Another thing I want Mr. Hustwick

to answer is this. Why does he refer to the art of the motion picture as if it were something that could be separated from the whole picture business? Does he mean that writing photoplays and acting and directing and photographing, all put together, make a distinct and separate art? Or does he mean that there is something about the business that puts it in the same class as writing operas or painting or any other art that can be analyzed and discussed as an entity?

H. R. M.

Whittier, Calif.

AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — The Spectator's 16-Year-Old Critic

ACCORDING to a magazine I happened to pick up the other day, Tommy Meighan is supposed to be up among the big money-makers of the screen. However, if he continues to make pictures like The Canadian, the end of his box office value is only a question of a few more pictures. Meighan is one of the best looking men on the screen, and he has plenty of punch, too.

The best looking man in the world can't get away with a whole picture full of close-ups of himself. And when Meighan tries it, he falls flat, because a lot of popularity rests on his vigorous, he-man action in his pictures. He had better start getting back into that kind of pictures, or he will lose his drawing power.

If he doesn't change, he ought to make a success in the bed-time story-telling business, because pictures like The Canadian would put anybody to sleep.

"BARBED WIRE"

Much to the surprise of a lot of people, probably, a new angle of the war has been given to the screen. So many war stories have been shown up to date that there scarcely seems room for another one, but Barbed Wire is such a departure from the others that it will be welcome. In most of the pictures so far, the Germans were made to look like fiends, except in What Price Glory? where

they were subordinated in fiendishness by the American troops.

This was a story of a German prisoner and a French girl, with Pola Negri doing fine work as the girl. Clive Brook performed as splendidly as usual as the prisoner.

There were two things which lifted the picture from the ranks of just good pictures and landed it among the best. Those two things were the sequence where the girl testified against a Frenchman to save her lover from unjust punishment. When she had done it, the whole French village scorned her and only the German prisoners applauded her for her brave act. The scene where she hurried along the road with the Germans cheering her and her friends reviling her was one of the best of the picture. The next great scene, the greatest in the picture, was the scene where the blind returned soldier spoke to the crowd, and asked them to stop hating, as the dead begged them to.

"THE MIDNIGHT SUN"

There was a lot of money spent on The Midnight Sun, apparently, but it

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would have been a much better picture if whoever made it had gone to the trouble to make the details correct. The picture should have been good because it had a good staff working on it, with Walter Anthony doing the titles. The titles, by the way, were not worthy of him at all. Pat O'Malley made a good grand duke, and Laura La Plante was as sweet and pretty as usual. George Seigman made a very good heavy, which is a habit with him. Raymond Keane gave a rather colorless performance, but maybe he would have been better if he had been given time to get his breath, as he seemed to be perpetually breathless. He might be good, if he would only get rid of the ardent look which he carried all through the picture.

The lack of respect shown a grand duke who could sentence a man to death for slapping his face was remarkable. There was no kow-towing to him at all, except by a few.

Keane hit the duke, but he only slapped him. He would have been shot just the same if he had hauled off and knocked him cold. Anyway, no man is going to only slap another whom he hates. The clothes of the women were modern, notwithstanding that the time was about thirteen years ago. At another time, Miss La Plante and the hero were supposed to have been walking in the moonlight. They might just as well have made it sunlight, for there was practically no difference between the sunlit and the moonlit scenes. The grand duke ordered the fastest destroyer in the service to chase the heavy's yacht. Perhaps it didn't occur to him that the fastest destroyer may have

been in the South Seas. After they got off the destroyer, they rushed frantically along typical California streets. Pictures like this aren't going to boost Universal any.

DENNY SLIPS

Universal has rather unique ideas on publicity. They advertise *The Cheerful Fraud* as a second Skinner's *Dress Suit* or *This Happened to Jones*. That's a rather strange thing to do, because *Take It From Me* was a much better picture than either of those other two. If they had to use comparisons, to say that *The Cheerful Fraud* was as good as *Take It From Me* would have been much better. Not that *The Cheerful Fraud* was as good as *Take It From Me*, but it would have been just as truthful as saying it was like Skinner's *Dress Suit* or *This Happened to Jones*. Maybe I didn't enjoy this picture as much as I would have if it hadn't been run through hurriedly at the end of a New Year's Eve matinee.

Unlike *Take It From Me* there was a constant straining for laughs in *The Cheerful Fraud*. The whole picture was somewhat forced, and had little of the breezy humor that characterizes the Denny-Seiter comedies. One thing I will say for them both, and that is that they are still keeping away from making all their pictures the same. However, they had better be careful that they don't spoil the general tone of their comedies in their attempts at variety. There was a bad lapse into silliness in this picture during the sequence where Denny and the heavy were fighting in a speeding automobile. The car apparently steered itself, which was silly and bordered on slap-stick. The next Denny picture should be an improvement on this.

"WHAT PRICE GLORY?"

All the big pictures lately, except *Beau Geste*, have been disappointments to me. *What Price Glory?* is just the same as the rest. After the seventy-eighth time Edmund Lowe and Victor Maclaglen staged their little swearing contest, it began to get monotonous. I'm probably too dumb to see it, but I don't see where anyone gets the idea that *What Price Glory?* is a great picture. Just because it is filthy, and is twelve reels

long is no proof that it is a great picture.

I read Dad's criticism of it before I went to see it, so maybe I am influenced by his views. As a rule, he and I don't discuss pictures until I have written my reviews, but he saw this picture before I did, and got his criticism in before I could, so I couldn't help but get his view first. He said that he had no sympathy for any of the principals, but I liked Captain Flagg more than I did the rest of the cast, although that's not saying much, because the rest were duds when it came to establishing sympathy.

How Victor Maclaglen as Captain Flagg ever got away with all his drunkenness and rough-housing is a mystery. No one ever seemed to think it strange that a top-sergeant would stand up and curse a commissioned officer until he was blue in the face. Soldiers would stand around the door and listen to them swear, and seem to find nothing out of the ordinary in the performance.

Towards the last of the picture they all had some kind of axle-grease on their faces, but it was hard to determine what it was supposed to represent. It couldn't have been meant for mud, because all the time the troops were fighting they raised clouds of dust. Never during the fighting sequences did they get into mud.

From now on I think I will confine myself to smaller pictures. They are more dependable.

The Examiner says that there is a scramble among producers to sign up directors. If they interested themselves more in people who understand stories and how they should be screened, producers would find that it was an easy matter to get directors. There is nothing mysterious about directing. Anyone with some knowledge of the fundamentals of picture making and with sense enough to permit him to grasp an author's conception of a scene, can put such scene on the screen adequately. The director situation is serious only because producers do not allow literary people to have contact with productions. They expect directors to supply the literary touch and there are not half a dozen in the business who have the necessary mental equipment for it.

Fascinating Youth features the Charleston. This makes the picture old fashioned already. In making pictures it is unwise to incorporate fancies upon which the public is expending more enthusiasm than it can maintain. Such pictures can last only as long as the enthusiasm.

A real need in Hollywood is the establishment of an institution to teach screen artists how to walk. Hedda Hopper is about the only woman who knows how to do it, and James Young is about the only director who knows how it should be done.

MALCOLM STUART BOYLAN
Supervising Editor
Title Department
FOX
 Ⓜ

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IN THIS NUMBER

NEW YORK

REMEMBER

KID BROTHER

APPLESAUCE

OLD IRONSIDES

NIGHT OF LOVE

GOING CROOKED

SUBWAY SADIE

MIDNIGHT KISS

SNARL OF HATE

THE OWL WITCH

FLAMING FRONTIER

FOOTLOOSE WIDOWS

EVERYBODY'S ACTING

SOME

YOUTHFUL

CRITICISMS

SUMMER BACHELORS

BLONDE OR BRUNETTE

THE COUNTRY BEYOND

LETTERS

FROM

READERS

EDWARD LEVEQUE

EDWARD LEVEQUE

THE FILM SPECTATOR

EVERY OTHER SATURDAY

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THINK about motion pictures.*

HOLLYWOOD, CALIF., FEBRUARY, 19, 1927

"Old Ironsides" Is Quite Stupid

"CRITICIZE that!" said Bernie Fineman to me exultantly as we were filing out of Grauman's Egyptian after the premier of *Old Ironsides*. Thanks—I will. It is the most stupid big picture ever produced. It takes a glorious page out of the history of the United States and by stupid writing, directing and editing makes a sorry mess of it. Paramount is to be commended for its endeavor. It saw in the episode of the U. S. S. Constitution a theme for a great motion picture. It spent money lavishly to get such a picture, and the only reaction that the audience receives from the result is due entirely to the waving of the flag and not at all to any drama that is put on the screen. *Old Ironsides* is a deplorable example of screen craftsmanship. All its dramatic virtues are in the first few hundred feet. The scene in Congress Hall, Philadelphia, is handled splendidly. Ben Hendricks, by fine acting, makes a distinct appeal to our patriotic emotions, and Rupert Hughes, by some excellently written titles, puts over the message of the picture. But except for some amusing comedy, well done by Wally Beery and George Bancroft, the picture ends there. There are some isolated bits that stand out to relieve the gloom surrounding them, but which lose all their vigor through lack of contact with one another. Perhaps there are five reels of good stuff in *Old Ironsides*—not more. About that much footage is devoted to what the picture is about, the dramatic and colorful exploit of the Constitution in ridding American shipping of the menace of pirates, something out of which a wonderful motion picture could have been made if intelligence had been applied to its making. Always I enumerate the items in my indictment of any picture. That much is due the people who made it, and without the items the whole serves no purpose. But even the importance of *Old Ironsides* as a picture would not justify the use of as much space as it would require to set down all its faults. I can touch on only a few. Surely the script contained a better story than the one that reached the screen. It looks to me like one of those twenty-reel literary efforts which they shoot and then put a blindfolded person on

the floor of the cutting-room and gum together the pieces he picks up. They keep on turning out pictures in that way, although a really good picture never will be the product of such a system. Lawrence Stallings, Harry Carr and Walter Woods are credited on the screen with the literary end of *Old Ironsides* and they ought to be ashamed of themselves if among them can be distributed the blame for the raggedness of the attempt to tell a story. After the good start it gets, it falls into the clutches of a mechanical mind which decrees that you can carry a picture just so far without a love element. In the first half of *Old Ironsides* is possibly the most unreal love story ever shown on the screen, a string of utterly absurd scenes, deady dull in themselves, ridiculously extravagant in their emotions and unrelated to the theme of the story. James Cruze is about as tender in his love scenes as a shunting engine is among box cars. While I do not think that any director could have made a good picture out of the material provided for *Old Ironsides*, I am confident that there are several who could have made a better job of it than Jimmy did.

* * *

Chances for Drama Are Muddled Badly

THE big battle at the end of *Old Ironsides* is a striking example of poor directing or worse editing. As it does not seem reasonable that one man could make a picture so faulty without assistance, we will have to

HOW CAN WE KNOW?

As nightly I go down the street
I scan each lurid poster sheet
To find some play whose theme will merge
With my own temperamental urge;
That is to say, when strong desire
Needs fuel to feed its smold'ring fire,
I yearn to see emotions shown
In some accordance with my own.

If sentimental be my thought,
Why then, it seems, the picture ought
To be replete with good intent
And love—the flower of sentiment.

If in a sad, depressing mood,
Where Melancholia and her brood
Of horrid imps disturb my sleep,
Oh then, oh then! I fain would weep
In sympathy with troubles shown—
Of course—more poignant than my own.

If in a joyous frame of mind,
I like to see a frothy kind,
With Song and Laughter, Jest and Quip
In gay carousal, lip to lip.

But woe is me! Alack-a-day!
I never see for what I pay!
How can I know when on the street
That applesauce is served for meat:
That comedy is oftentimes sad,
The morals of a picture bad,
And that which fills my soul with joy—
One suited to my mood? Oh, boy!

—THE PROOFREADER.

attribute the faults in this one to the composite mind of its makers. This mind is responsible for a most unimaginative naval battle that should have been crammed with thrills. It should have had one supreme moment, one culminating point that would bring an audience to its feet. Paramount had a glorious page in American history and two million dollars to produce such thrill, but failed. By neglecting to make the story stick definitely to one line of thought, and by treating what story there was in a manner that robbed it of all reality, it left the mind of the audience without a focal point in the battle upon which to fasten its attention. There was nothing dramatic about the beginning of the battle, about its progress or its end. It is edited wretchedly. As it opens we are shown the exchange of broadsides between the ships and the shore battery, and about the time we might have become interested in it, there is a switch to American and enemy ships, and we are left to wonder if the shore gun crews had gone off shift. Lord Nelson characterized the blowing up of the Philadelphia as "the most bold and daring act of the age." As this picture shows it, Johnnie Walker paddles over with a gang of comrades, does the blowing up and paddles back. There is not a thrill in it. There is much cutting during the battle to irrelevant things. On the false theory that the interest of the audience has been centered in Charlie Farrell, there are cuts to acquaint us with what he is doing, thus attempting to make his fate of more importance than the outcome of the battle. And there are other cuts to comedy scenes that divert the attention of the audience from the theme of the story, exhibitions of remarkably poor screen craftsmanship. Esther Ralston is made such an unreal character that at no time is it possible for one to become concerned in her fate, so it is just as well that there are no cuts to her during the battle. The escape of the four Americans from the enemy camp might have become tense if it had been allowed to. But again slapstick methods are resorted to and an utterly absurd love scene introduced. With the lives of four men hanging by a thread, three apparently remain suspended in the air while the fourth passionately kisses a girl and makes tender speeches to her, further registering the love between them, although at least one reel previously had been wasted in planting it, without the audience caring a hoot whether they loved or hated one another, for the theory upon which the picture was based was that the audience would be interested only in the historical significance of it. We are shown Farrell's reactions to scenes in the ship's hospital, reactions that had as much to do with the story as the outcome of the next world's series has. Despite the fact that the reviews

in the daily papers re-echoed the statements in the advertising pages that *Old Ironsides* is a great picture, I do not share Sid Grauman's opinion that it will run a year at his house. I think its life there will be short. Outside of the splendid performances of Wally Beery and George Bancroft and the sympathetic and meritorious prologue that Sid has given it, it has nothing to recommend it. There is not as much advanced screen thought in its whole length as there is in one reel of Clarence Brown's *Flesh and the Devil*. It would have made me much happier to have found *Old Ironsides* something that I could have praised, for I always am pulling for every picture to make good.

* * *

How Not to Film a Super Spectacle

THE motion picture mind does not approach these "epic" pictures in a way to produce good results. To spend two million dollars and get nothing better than *Old Ironsides* is an economic and artistic crime. I do not know how the picture was made. What you read in *The Spectator* is prompted by what I see on the screen, not by studio gossip. One can argue with more abandon when he has no facts to go on. My guess about the latest Cruze opus is that at no time did anyone connected with it deem it necessary to have more than a mere thread of a story. Spectacle was counted on to put the picture over. That is good reasoning when the spectacle in itself has entertainment value. I believe it is not going to matter greatly whether Cecil de Mille has much of a story in *The King of Kings*. The picture will have majesty, overwhelming beauty, and deals with a subject that allows latitude in treatment, for while its locale is fixed, and its main incidents matters of historical record, there is nothing to prevent a producer giving us his own conception of settings, costume and general atmosphere, for we have no standard by which to judge them. In such a beautiful production as *Faust* the story is not of supreme importance. Whatever it may lack in literary value is compensated for in the grandeur of Erich Pommer's conception of its setting. The chief appeal of such pictures is to our aesthetic sense. But when we start to make an *Old Ironsides*, *Rough Riders* or *Wings* we can not rely on aesthetic appeal. We are dealing with grim realities. The value of the story is the sum total of the value of the production, for the magnitude of the scenes is but part of the story. In building up *The King of Kings* DeMille can sacrifice the narrative to some superb scenic effect; in developing a physical picture like *Old Ironsides* the moment you sacrifice the narrative you harm the whole production. In the case of the former you may start with the items of your spectacle and fashion a frail story to knit them together; in the case of the latter you must have a stirring, consistent and dramatic story, and plan your spectacle with the single thought for its value as story material. No doubt Paramount handled *Old Ironsides* as De Mille is handling *The King of Kings*. The spectacle was considered to be the chief thing and so much of it was shot that when cutting time came the production value was fixed in the studio mind as being of supreme importance and in the attempt to crowd all of it in the finished film there was no room for whatever story value the script contained. If Paramount had centered its attention on the story and prepared a per-

TAY GARNETT

Writer

DE MILLE STUDIO



Demmy Lamson, Manager
Ruth Collier and W. O. Christian, Associates

fect one of suitable length, then planned its spectacle solely as part of the story, it could have saved a million dollars in production cost and given us a picture that would gross a couple of million dollars more than *Old Ironsides* will earn. If Stephen Decatur had been made the central figure in a story that settled down to the business of making us interested in him, we might have had a picture half as good as *Bernie Fineman* thinks *Old Ironsides* is, and that is twice as good as a picture need be to make a pile of money.

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"Night of Love" a Good Picture

THE *Night of Love* is the latest picture in which Samuel Goldwyn presents Vilma Banky and Ronald Colman to their admiring millions. George Fitzmaurice directed and makes of it one of the most artistic offerings the screen has shown since the same combination gave us *The Dark Angel*, a really notable picture. Miss Banky and Colman are called upon to do their best work in some highly dramatic scenes and some tender love scenes, and at all times meet the demands in a manner that will enhance the hold they have on those who patronize pictures. Scenically the production is a triumph. It is an early seventeenth century story, with both ducal and gypsy atmosphere, permitting elaborate costuming, antique and picturesque interiors and striking exterior shots. Fitzmaurice is at his best with such atmosphere and presents a series of exquisite pictures. Pictorially *The Night of Love* stands comparison with the finest costume pictures that I have seen. Sam Goldwyn, our most consistent producer of good pictures, may congratulate himself upon having given the screen another most worthy film. The secret of Goldwyn's success is that he releases a picture when it is completed, instead of completing it to meet a release date. He starts production only when he has made his story as perfect as possible, and takes all the time that is necessary in shooting, cutting and titling it. No other system will produce works of screen art. But perfection in a system does not compensate for imperfections in the story, and no picture can be great without a great story. *The Night of Love* is weak in theme when compared with such a picture as *Flesh and the Devil*. The former is a story of a lust for revenge; the latter tells the story of a great friendship. Fitzmaurice does not relate his narrative with the swift succession of dramatic incidents that Clarence Brown uses with such telling effect in his picture. *The Night of Love* drags. The story is interrupted to permit comedy shots that to me are not at all funny, and even if they were, they do nothing to advance the narrative, which is reason enough for their exclusion. They contribute largely to the excess footage from which the picture suffers. Several scenes are too long drawn out. One is in a gypsy camp, its purpose being to plant the dawn of love between Vilma and Colman. There are cuts from them to an entertainment staged by the gypsies. Far too much footage is devoted to a dance that in itself is not at all entertaining. The interest of the viewer is in the principal characters and the only permissible cut from them is to something still more interesting. In this instance the cuts are to a particularly uninteresting dance and its reaction on people who are of no importance to the story and who in no way are involved in the love scene.

Perhaps one purpose of the scene was to show Vilma the attractiveness of gypsy life to give impetus to her growing resolve to remain in the camp with Colman, the gypsy leader. If so, it fails of its purpose, for the particular phase of the life which it presents is too dull to attract a young woman. Colman enters a cell in which Miss Banky is a prisoner and although the duke's retainers are hot on his heels he tries to make love before conveying her to a place of safety. It is a hoary movie habit which takes almost all the drama out of scenes which should be dramatic. Such scenes should be presented in a manner that would point up the danger the characters are running. When the man pauses to caress the girl it means either that there is no danger or that he is taking too great a chance with the girl's safety. If Colman had rushed into the cell, grabbed Vilma and rushed out, the scene would have retained all its drama. As presented it is liable to cause irritation.

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Summing Up the Debits and Credits

THE *Night of Love* is a good picture. I repeat that to keep you from getting the impression that the faults I enumerate spoil it as a whole. They do not. I do not believe that any picture in which Vilma Banky and Ronald Colman appear could be devoid of entertainment value. When I become specific in pointing out a minor fault in a film it is in the hope that, if I be right, a similar fault will be avoided in the future production of some reader. You should see *The Night of Love*. Don't let anything I have said, or will say, give you any other impression. There is another fault similar to that committed in the gypsy camp scene. Vilma is being returned to her husband, the duke, by Colman. A riotous feast is in progress in the great hall of the castle, a Bacchanalian revelry in which almost naked girls disport themselves. At the time the audience, I think, will be interested mainly in the meeting of the husband and wife. Alone in the projection-room I could scent drama, but I had to view several cuts from the dancing girls to Vilma and Colman, had even to read titles in the dancing sequence, before the meeting occurred. Suspense, perhaps you will contend. I term it irritation. There always is more suspense in swiftly moving action than in scenes that are extended by shots that are extraneous to them. Nothing extraneous can contribute to the suspense of a scene. When two characters are coming together in a meeting that is fraught with drama, take as long as you will to bring them together, but keep them moving towards one another and do not allow anything not pertaining to the scene to break in on it. That is the way you get suspense. There is still another scene in *The Night of Love* presented in a manner that robs it of the suspense that rightly should have characterized it. There is a price on Colman's head and the duke's retainers are anxious to earn it. He brings Vilma to the castle, a daring thing to do. But if you entered the theatre at the beginning of the sequence you would have to sit through the entire picture before you would discover that there is anything daring in it. There is not a soldier in sight, not a sentry on duty. Vilma and Colman stand in the center of the court in the bright moonlight. Neither registers that there is any need for precaution, that he is running any risk of losing his life. How can you expect

an audience to see danger in a scene handled in a manner that indicates that the director did not think it was dangerous? If the two characters had sought safety by darting from one dark recess to another; if sentries had passed within a few feet of them; if they had embraced in the shadow of a menacing battleaxe, the sequence would have been thrilling enough to keep one on the edge of his chair. As we see it, it is unreal, tame and makes no appeal to the imagination. But the proportion of my space that I have devoted to the demerits of the picture is out of all proportion to the footage they occupy in the production. The story is based on a rather daring premise, an old Romany law that permitted a duke to enjoy the first night of love of a bride of a retainer, but it is handled adroitly by Lenore Coffee and directed with good taste by Fitzmaurice. You can take the children. The duke is played by Montague Love and I don't think I ever have seen him give a finer performance. Natalie Kingston is quite a captivating little heavy woman. One thing I noticed about her was that when she was pleased by the discomfiture of her rival there was real humor in her smile. It was not the hard, sneering smile of the standard model villainess. John George, as a jester, gives a very worthy performance. Photography is credited to George Burns and Thomas Brannigan, who deserve great praise for their contribution to the production. The titles by Edwin Justin Mayer are written all right, but punctuated in a manner that takes most of the vigor out of them. When are these people going to learn that it is only by correct punctuation that the full strength of a title can be brought out?

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George Melford Has a Good One

GEORGE MELFORD has made a gripping and highly entertaining crook drama out of *Going Crooked*. A few years ago Melford was giving the screen some of the best pictures it was getting, but of late I have not seen his name connected with important productions. I do not know if I may term *Going Crooked* a "come back" for him, but certainly it reveals that he has not lost his vigor, his sense of drama or his eye for composition. He has given us one of the best pictures that have come from the Fox studio for a long time. He keeps the story moving briskly, handles his big scenes with sureness and without heroics, and shows himself an adept at portraying drama according to the prevailing method of repression. No scene is overdone and none is carried one foot beyond the length necessary to the telling of its share of the story. The only weakness of the picture is in the editing. Close-ups are used with inexcusable prodigality and the force of many scenes is lessened by them. Those who edit productions do not seem to realize that screen art consists of telling stories through the medium of pictures, not of portraits. There seems to be a mechanical rule calling for the use of close-ups whenever they can be inserted, regardless of their dramatic significance. Used correctly they would be inserted only when it is impossible to register the point in a medium or long shot, for every close-up robs a production of pictorial value that properly belongs to it. George Melford has one of the best casts of the season in *Going Crooked*. Bessie Love, that superb little artist, is the girl. Oscar Shaw, who made an impression in *Up Stage*, scores again

in this picture. He is one of the most sincere leading men on the screen. Gustav von Seyffertitz, a really great actor, has a prominent part and injects in it a degree of art that gives it high rating as a performance. Leslie Fenton, another conscientious actor, contributes largely to this dramatic treat. Lydia Knot plays his grief-stricken mother in a convincing manner, and we have a brief glimpse of Evelyn Selbie, a sterling character actress who, in my opinion, has no peer among the women of the screen. Edgar Kennedy plays a detective and can not be blamed for the fact that his characterization contributes the only note of unfeeling that the production reveals. No doubt the script called for a comedy detective and Melford and Kennedy had to make the best of it. A writer takes liberties with probability when he specifies that a typical screen boob detective be assigned to the task of solving a great jewel robbery. It is all right in a farce, but he is as much out of place in a gripping drama as a pink elephant would be. But if you can stand the epidemic of close-ups and swallow the detective, you will find *Going Crooked* one of the most entertaining crook dramas that have come along in a long time. The fact that Melford had a good story and a capable cast to work with does not lessen the credit due him for molding his materials into a really worth while picture. The story was adapted for the screen by Keene Thompson from a play of the same name by Aaron Hoffman and William Collier Sr. It was titled by William Counselman, who was extraordinarily careless about the punctuation of the titles. The lighting and photography strike a high note. They play a considerable part in the effective telling of the story. Charles Clarke did the camera work.

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Menjou's Latest Is a Poor Thing

WHEN a picture opens with a close-up of a butler asking his employer if he is going to dine at home, followed by a close-up of the employer saying that he is not, followed by a close-up of the butler asking his employer if he is going to the theatre, followed by a close-up of the employer saying that he is not, you may know that you are in for a particularly unimaginative motion picture. And that is what *Blonde or Brunette* is. The stupid abuse of close-ups matches the general stupidity of the whole treatment of the production. The story is a frothy thing that someone with a Lubitsch touch might have made mildly amusing. It is something not suitable to Richard Rosson's style of directing, a practical, downright method which is all right for turning out little program pictures, but which does not reveal the niceties that belong to sophisticated French comedies. The editing robbed the picture of whatever chance the director gave it. All the scenes are mounted well and the characters are attired smartly, which would have permitted the film to have had considerable pictorial value, but such quality, as well as the story itself, were sacrificed in the cutting to the ridiculous obsession for close-ups. Attractive backgrounds and groupings that mean something are obliterated to allow for close-ups that mean nothing. If anyone connected with pictures can justify a close-up of a butler asking his boss where he's going to eat, I wish he would forward his argument to me. I am sure all of us would like to read it. To be thoroughly inconsistent even in its faults, *Blonde or Brunette* gives Menjou one

title in a long shot. If such be permissible once in a picture, why not oftener? The literary weaknesses of the production are as glaring as its technical weaknesses. Adolphe Menjou is the hero and to be amusing to the audience the story must make it sympathize with his tribulations. Such a story can be interesting only in the degree that the audience is interested in the principal character. But Menjou is characterized as a hopeless ass who deserves all the unhappiness that comes his way. Not at one spot in the picture is he shown as having as much character as a goldfish. In the opening sequence he is revealed as a poor sap who allows some drunken friends to overrun his house. We have hopes for him when he begins to register indignation. We expect to see him chuck out the offenders, but all he does is to leave himself, after giving spirited utterance to a rather silly title. A man who leaves his home to escape objectionable acquaintances who infest it is not much of a man, but such a one is the hero of this story. Later we see him sitting in misery while his wife plays the harp and sings to him, and then devoid of enough spirit to oppose his wife's wishes when he desires to draw the curtains to permit enough daylight to enter the room to permit him to read. We have such men in real life, but we classify them as poor fish; not as heroes, and we don't give a damn what happens to them. John McDermott adapted *Blonde* or *Brunette* from something or other, which may or may not have had some merit to start with. Certainly the adaptation has none. I do not know if the title of the picture should have a question mark after it. The fact that it has none on the screen means nothing, for Paramount is careless with them. But I think *Blonde* or *Brunette*? would have been slightly more intriguing. And it would have been a little bit of meaning in this otherwise meaningless picture.

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Proving That You Never Know

HEREAFTER I am going to do my own roasting of pictures and give credence to the criticisms of no one else. Everyone panned *The Flaming Frontier*. I read so many adverse reviews, and so many of my picture-wise friends told me that it was no good, that I avoided it in favor of pictures that the chances were I would praise. I like to say nice things about what I see on the screen. But one night *The Flaming Frontier* came to one of my favorite neighborhood theatres—the one where the blonde cashier reads Schopenhauer and smiles while making change—and being the only new picture showing that night within my rambling limits, and having the option of seeing it or helping my younger daughter with her algebra, a study of which I am so ignorant that I marvel at anyone who knows what it is about, I chose the lesser of the two evils, fully aware that it would prompt me to make caustic comments on it. And I liked it. I liked every reel of it and think it a splendid picture, statements which place me at issue with all the reviewers in the country who have brains. True, I think that Hoot Gibson's wig might have been a bit nattier, that it is unlikely that automobiles were parked at the side of the West Point parade grounds in 1872, and that Ward Crane looks funny with a sweeping moustache and a goatee, but there were things of so much more importance in *The Flaming Frontier* that only a captious critic would peck

at such details. There were several flaws in the production that I would criticize if I found them in screen offerings that are nothing but motion pictures. In the last *Spectator* I pointed out many faults in a recent Hoot Gibson picture, which was merely a Western made for the sole purpose of entertaining. *The Flaming Frontier* is more than a Western, more than a motion picture. It is a bit of American history, a colorful and tragic bit that Ed Sedgewick presents with a wealth of color and an appreciation of the tragedy that makes it rise above the ordinary screen narrative that one can condemn when it takes liberties with screen technic. What is a fitless wig compared with the desperate and hopeless last stand of Custer? Why worry about anachronistic automobiles when thousands of Indians are preparing an ambush for American soldiers? Why cavil at Hoot's lovemaking when he rides so magnificently and heroically in a pathetic and fruitless attempt to succor his doomed comrades? Leave your meticulous motion picture mind at home when you view *The Flaming Frontier* and you will see a great epic of the time when the West was young, when brave men were carving the United States on the unscarred plains over which Civilization had to trek to reach the ocean where it began. Universal deserves praise both for making this picture and for making it so well. It has an extraordinary sweep, and performs the miracle of making the audience sympathize with both sides in the warfare between the Indians and the soldiers. In this respect the picture is eminently fair, consequently being a valuable historical document that should be preserved at Washington for future generations of America to consult.

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Gibson's Riding and Other Things

THERE are some features of *The Flaming Frontier* more important than Hoot's wig, that might be discussed with profit to the makers of pictures. Walter Anthony gives a series of stirring titles to point up the drama of the gathering of the Indians. The purpose of the titles is to show us how widespread is the uprising, the names of a score of different tribes being given. But each title is followed by a scene showing Indians coming down a hill, and apparently the same hill was used in every shot. Sedgewick overlooked some good drama and opportunities for superb photography, by not showing the oncoming Indians in different locales. One tribe was enough to bring down the hill. Another could have been shown fording a stream, another filing through a rocky pass, another following a precipice around a mountain, another as a crawling mark in the immensity of a level plain. Such shots would have added to the pictorial wealth of the production and made more dramatic the rebellion of the Indians. In the West Point sequence a scene shows Gibson being a victim of a silence sentence. He was dismissed from the academy, he was to speak to no one and no one would speak to him. When he is leaving in disgrace he endeavors to speak to everyone he encounters, meeting with rebuffs that were designed to create sympathy for him. Did he not understand his sentence? Did he not know that he would be rebuffed? Instead of creating sympathy, such scenes served only to indicate that he had little intelligence. A dramatic scene achieves the ultimate in drama only when it is presented perfectly. No true drama can be built on

hokum. Hoot's departure from the academy would have been more impressive, and would have aroused more sympathy for him, if he had passed through groups of his former comrades, with eyes front, shoulders back, step firm, accepting his fate like the gentleman and soldier the audience knew him to be. As presented it was bad direction. But there is a tremendous amount of good direction in the picture to make up for it. I think it was in the first Spectator that I said a weakness of *The Pony Express* was the failure to have the riders always pressing onward, never stopping for a moment. An early sequence in *The Flaming Frontier* shows Gibson as a pony express rider. In every shot he is flying over the ground. When still in motion he leaps from his horse and hardly touches the ground before he is in another saddle and away in a rush. Without slackening speed he delivers a message to an orderly of General Custer and presses onward to his destination. There is drama in that ride, drama that *The Pony Express* sadly needed. And how Hoot Gibson can ride! You will recall that several times I have said that there should be more riding in Westerns. There are few men in the world who have the superb grace of Gibson in the saddle, but I have seen him in pictures in which he scarcely rides at all. I believe I could stand a few reels of nothing but his riding with the camera going along beside him. I do not see why they persist in making such an artist on a horse's back such a clumsy goof on the ground. A man who can ride as he does would show a little more grace on his feet. But that is not the way they characterize Hoot, and I think he ought to do something about it. Either that, or he should stay in the saddle all the time and make Pavlowa jealous.

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Why Not Simply Shoot One Picture?

THERE are shots in *The Flaming Frontier* which indicate that it was the product of that Hollywood system by which several pictures are shot, cut up and one made out of the pieces. Hoot Gibson delivers a message to Reno. After he says something he is grabbed by two soldiers and backed against a tree. Then there is a cut to something else. The reason for the rough treatment no doubt remained on the cutting-room floor. No sane director would shoot such a scene by itself. No perfect script would contain it. You may remember that I enumerated many illogical scenes in *The Third Degree*. For example: Jason Robards is characterized as an aristocratic young man moving in the best society. I found fault with direction that permitted him to stride to his wife's table in a cafe without removing his hat. The other evening I dined with a person who worked on the picture. He told me that there had been a previous sequence showing a woman pressing drinks on Robards until he became intoxicated enough to do anything foolish, retaining his hat when he should have removed it being a logical manifestation of his condition. But in the completed picture there was no room for the explanatory sequence and only the scene which was inconsistent in itself was used. I was told that if *The Third Degree* had been released in twenty reels it would have been a wonderful picture without a single inconsistency. No doubt that is true, but why was it made that way? Von Stroheim is trying now to paw his way out from under four

hundred thousand feet of film, of which perhaps ten thousand feet will reach the screen. He starts out under obligation to his employer to spend \$350,000 and spends \$1,000,000. Yet he is hailed as a really great director. I can not see it. He shoots forty pictures and is praised because he can pick a good one out of them. There are a score or more American directors who could make great pictures if they were allowed to run wild as Von Stroheim is. Almost everyone in the business will tell you that it is necessary to shoot thousands of feet of surplus film before cutting begins. A drunkard will tell you that it is necessary for him to have a few more drinks. If you be one of those who believe that ordinary efficiency has no place in the motion picture industry, toddle over to the Forum and take a look at *Flesh and the Devil*, a finer example of directing than Von Stroheim ever gave us. It more nearly matches my taste in screen art than anything that he has done. Clarence Brown shot that picture within time schedule and cost estimate. Von Stroheim took eight months on *The Wedding March*, Brown eight weeks on *Flesh and the Devil*, and if the former comes anywhere near being as good a picture as the latter I will take off my hat to Von. Lubitsch is another man who knows how to make a picture. He prepares a perfect script and then shoots it as written, within his cost budget and time limit. That is the only way in which a perfect picture can be made. Let us assume that Von gives us the greatest picture of all time in *The Wedding March*. Then I will say that it would have been still infinitely better if it had been made sensibly. You can not make a perfect picture out of pieces of a perfect one. Perfection ceases to be when the first sequence is eliminated. Perhaps the only way in which we can make pictures in Hollywood is the way we are making them now. But when we learn how to make them we won't be making them that way. And we will know why they get rough with Hoot.

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"Subway Sadie" Is Quite Heady

FIRST National's two Als—Rockett, supervisor, and Santell, director—introduce a new art in *Subway Sadie*, the art of telling a story with portraits. The production is a series of close-ups of Dorothy Mackaill, Jack Mulhall, Peggy Shaw, Gaston Glass, and a lot of other people of less importance to it. Occasionally there is a medium or long shot in order to keep us from forgetting whether the characters are in bed or walking in Central Park. There are many effective close-ups of Dorothy doing nothing, with cuts to close-ups of Jack watching her do nothing. After giving this new art due consideration I have arrived at the conclusion that I prefer the old-fashioned way of making motion pictures, the system that uses more backgrounds and less lipstick in telling stories. Of course, a screenful of face talking to itself is intriguing, but sometimes it interrupts interesting speculation. For instance, the closing sequence in *Subway Sadie* shows Jack Mulhall in bed. Before the close-ups start we get a glimpse of the room in which the bed is situated. Before I had concluded my study of the architecture to determine if Jack slept in a storage warehouse or a cathedral, the close-ups came on and I never saw the room again. However, this new art adds a mental stimulus to picture viewing that ordinary pictures lack and for that it is to be commended. You must keep alert

or you will forget where you last saw the bodies of the characters. At one time Dorothy's head was talking while the camera made frequent jabs at Peggy's head to keep us from wondering if Dorothy had gone batty. The last I saw of Dorothy's body showed it encased in her nightie. I dropped my stick and my dive to retrieve it was prolonged by someone with fallen arches stepping on my hand. When I came up I thought I had lost nothing, for Dorothy's head was talking still, but I got quite a jar when Mulhall's head sprang onto the screen instead of Peggy's, and I was shocked by my supposition that he had crawled into bed with her, but was relieved later to discover that by that time the two heads were making love to one another in Central Park. The picture deals largely with Dorothy's head yearning to go to Paris. Finally her boss' head tells her head that she has been appointed Paris buyer for the firm. But before that, her head has become engaged to marry Jack's head. The Paris appointment plays havoc with the love affair of the two heads. They meet in Central Park, on the very same bench upon which Jack's head had proposed to Dorothy's head, and Dorothy's head tells Jack's head that the engagement is off, for she is going with her head to Paris. Her head bids his head a very tragic farewell and passes out of the scene. Why her head did not tell his head that the wedding would have to be postponed until she returned with her head from Paris I do not know. Normal people would have handled the situation that way. The scene was designed to be impressive and very sad, but it was based on such a ridiculous premise that it was absurd. First National seems to be making a specialty of presenting us with pictures that are an insult to even childish minds. It is hard to imagine how any producer can expect an audience to accept seriously as a big scene one showing a girl pathetically breaking off an engagement, while reiterating her protestations of love, because she is going to Paris on a business trip. I'm going to San Francisco next week. I suppose I'll have to divorce Mrs. Spectator and bid the children a tearful, last farewell.

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Here Is One Girl Who Knows How

THE ability to act naturally in front of the camera is somewhat rare among those who appear on the screen. Practically everyone you see in a picture conveys the impression that he is acting. No film that I have seen in a long time is freer from obvious histrionics than *Summer Bachelors*, which Allan Dwan directed for Fox. There are a lot of people in it and they move through the story with a degree of naturalness that you seldom see, a tribute to the splendid direction that Dwan gave them. But there is one girl, Lelia Hyams, whom I never saw before, who conducts herself as if she were totally unconscious that there was a camera within a mile of her. Not in one foot of film does she convey the impression that she is acting, although the part that she plays is that of an actress. As I watched her the thought came to me that if we had more like her, people who can walk through parts as naturally as they walk through parks, we would have better pictures because they would come to us exactly as authors write them. The trouble now is that as actors insist upon acting, authors must draw the parts with allowance for that fact. As long as Miss Hyams conducts herself as she does in *Summer*

Bachelors no author need worry about a part he writes for her. Apparently she does not have to act. She IS the part. She is a fine looking girl and it is a safe prediction that soon her name will be well known if she be fortunate enough to keep clear of directors who will insist upon her adopting the standard methods of expressing emotions. Madge Bellamy is almost equally natural in this picture. It is only a little while ago that she was acting all over the place. Something seems to have happened to her. She has lost all her old mannerisms and has subdued her eyes until we can see her other features. She is flawless in *Summer Bachelors* except in one scene and for the weakness in that I blame the direction. While under hypnotic influence she marries Allan Forrest, of course remembering nothing about it afterwards. When she learns of it she is surprised but slightly. Even allowing for all the vagaries of the present young generation, it appears to me that any normal girl would be astonished greatly to discover that she had become a wife without knowing anything about it. When Madge receives the startling information she is sitting on a bale of hay. It seems to me that she should be surprised at least enough to fall off. That one little scene is the only flaw in an otherwise perfectly directed picture. The story is not an inspiring one, dealing principally with girls who give parties for men whose wives are away for the summer, but it is handled delightfully and with the best of taste. An interesting feature is the inclusion of a minor love interest which ends with a sacrifice. Leila Hyams falls in love with Matt Moore, who she knows is married, and apparently is willing to break up his home until she learns that his wife is an invalid who could not stand the shock. The acting highlight of the production is the scene in which she bids farewell to Matt. It is done beautifully, and with a minimum of obvious acting Miss Hyams puts great feeling into it. As the long cast is presented in a list at the beginning of the film it is impossible for a reviewer to remember all the names. If the names appeared as the characters were introduced, as they should be, I could give credit by name to several people in *Summer Bachelors* who deserve it. I remember that Frances Agnew wrote the titles. She made a good job of them and punctuated them in a manner that does not detract from the general air of intelligent handling that the picture reflects. An elaborate production, splendid photography and beautiful gowns add their contributions to the general excellence of this thoroughly satisfying production. The Fox organization deserves credit.

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Mickey Neilan Does Quite Well

QUITE in line with *The Spectator's* contention in a recent issue that the public is ready for something human on the screen comes Mickey Neilan's *Everybody's Acting*. Barney Glazer, who has been doing notable screen writing of late, provides a fine shooting script from Mickey's own story, and Mickey puts it on the screen with the delightful, whimsical touch of which he is a master. It's an old story that has been done a hundred times—the girl who is brought up by a bunch of delightful fathers, their solicitude for her welfare being the whole thing. There are five bachelors this time, H. B. Walthall, Ed Martindel, Ford Sterling, Stuart Holmes and Raymond Hitchcock. They prove another point that I

have touched on—given a good cast and a sympathetic idea, and it matters little about the story. Just to see these splendid actors together in a scene and to realize that the scene has a beautiful thought back of it, is to derive enjoyment from whatever they do. Add to them Louise Dresser, as a hard-hearted business woman, Betty Bronson as the young thing whom it is about, Lawrence Gray as the young man who loves Betty; fold in an adequate production and stir briskly with Neilan's direction and you have a dainty dish which should appeal to any reasonable palate. It so happens that it is the screen fare that I, as an individual apart from the editor of *The Spectator*, get the greatest kick out of. Neilan strikes a human note in all his pictures that I like. I can not at the moment think of any other director with a sense of humor to match his. I am sure he gets a lot of fun out of everything he does. To make Betty an orphan in *Everybody's Acting* he murders her mother and hangs her father. I'll bet he grinned when he wrote such scenes. Neilan's indifference to screen conventions makes his pictures refreshing. He is not afraid to point his camera at a man's back, nor is he adverse to telling parts of his story in medium shots and even at times in long shots. We have few efficient directors. The great majority work according to formula. To them close-ups must follow medium shots. It makes no difference if the scene goes over perfectly in the medium shot; there simply have to be close-ups. Everybody does it, and that is the only excuse that can be offered for ninety-nine out of every hundred of them. When one man bounces a sledgehammer off the head of another, the scene can be planted with full force in a long shot. We see the blow struck, and that is the only important feature of the scene. But the automatic director does not rest there content. He moves up for a close-up of the man who delivered the blow. He shows us that the murderer has a murderous expression on his face as he swings the hammer, thus confirming our opinion that possibly such was the case, for we hardly could have expected him to be smiling cheerfully as he knocked his friend's brains out. But that is not what makes the close-up unnecessary. It is the fact that we are not interested in the man's expression. The blow is the important thing in the scene to us, and we have seen it in the long shot. But the average director can not follow such reasoning. He makes us look at a close-up solely because it is a screen habit. Mickey Neilan is not a creature of habits. He is content when he puts a scene over, no matter how it is accomplished. He should confine himself to such delightful simplicities as *Everybody's Acting*. There is nothing else that the screen needs as much as it needs homely sentiment that is not permitted to become maudlin.

* * *

"The Snarl of Hate" Good Dog Picture

SAM Bischoff invited me to witness a preview of *The Snarl of Hate*. I didn't go. I knew I would roast it if I saw it and I try to avoid pictures that I feel I will have to roast. I have many warm friends in the industry, but none warm enough to prompt me to record a poor picture as a good one. And, anyway, I knew that a picture with such a terrible title would be something awful. In addition to that, the hero is a police dog and although I am quite batty about dogs in general I have

no use whatever for that breed. But Sam grabbed me one day and thrust me and *The Snarl of Hate* into a projection room and I could not escape. He told me he didn't give a damn what I thought about his picture, but he wanted to know. Well, it's a pretty good film. In fact, it's the best police dog picture that I ever saw. It appeals to me because the hero, Silverstreak, can't act. Sam thinks he can, but he can't. You can see that every motion he makes is in response to direction, and he is not as sure of himself as is Rin-Tin-Tin, a real actor whom I never go to see because to me a dog is a dog and an actor is John Barrymore or someone else who subscribes to *The Spectator*. And it is because Silverstreak is a real dog that I like his picture. He looks as if he thought he is making an ass of himself when he tries to act, and that gets my sympathy, for I know how I'd feel if I had to stand in front of a camera and chew Doug Fairbanks' arm without really biting it. In *The Snarl of Hate* Johnnie Walker owns Silverstreak because he is a dog and not because he can read Horace in the original, work the combination of a safe or get rid of razor blades, three things which I am incapable of doing. He keeps him in his apartment in the city. Johnnie does not rely on Silverstreak to assist in the hunt for the man who murdered his (Johnnie's) brother. The dog works independently. I put the same idea in a dog story I wrote for Harry Rapf three years ago. I kept my dog in the city and made him act like a dog and not like Noah Beery. Harry thought the story was punk, which showed that he knows nothing about dogs and not a devil of a lot more about that kind of story. Anyway, along comes Sam Bischoff and out of the same idea makes the best dog picture I ever saw. Of course Johnnie Walker contributes something. Come to think of it, he contributes quite a lot. Somehow or other Johnnie always impresses me as a perfect type of the vibrant, young American, and in this picture he does some really good work. He has a dual role, playing two brothers, and gives a fine performance of each. Noel Smith directs. I don't know how long he has been in the business or what else he has done, but he gives this picture clever direction. He makes everything as plausible as the script would allow, shows a good grasp of composition and grouping, and tells his story without any heroics. In fact, the direction impressed me considerably. *The Snarl of Hate* is all right, but I still maintain that the real dog picture is going to be the one that shows a regular mutt with photographic personality, in a story that is based on the love between him and his master. The continued neglect of a field that would yield rich returns to the producer who exploited it with dog pictures that would appeal to all dog lovers always has been a puzzle. Why only dogs of the most unpopular breed are used in stories that do not allow them to act like dogs is quite beyond me.

* * *

"New York" and Some Woolen Socks

WHEN I dropped in on New York Michael Cassidy was on trial for murdering someone. I discovered that Mike was played by that dear lad from the Emerald Isle, Ricard O'Cortez, which gave me quite a start, but not one big enough to spoil the trial scene for me. It was handled capably by Luther Reed, who directed. Mickey Neilan previously used the same method of show-

ing the succession of witnesses by dissolves, a method quite good enough to copy. While I was worried about what would happen to Mike, Bill Powell gave some information which cleared him, and he took into his arms a young woman whom I did not recognize as Lois Wilson until I saw what was at another theatre and coming to the Metropolitan, a news reel, a stage show, Crazy Cat, a Pathecolor of a cat, George Young swimming and the front end of New York. Also at that time I discovered that there was no reason whatever why Cortez, a perfect Latin type, should have been made an Irishman. It made the picture get off to a bad start with me. In the opening sequence Estelle Taylor, who, by the way, does splendid work in as much of the picture as I saw, registers jealousy in a slap-bang way to get the story under way. She loves Cortez, consequently should be pleased to hear Lois Wilson praise his music; but she flies off the handle without any reason other than movie requirements. Item number two against the picture. Then it began to dawn on me what an opportunity for notable photography Paramount East Coast studio overlooked. An effort was made to show the noisy soul of New York and it was about as exciting as looking at picture post cards. There was an opportunity for some of the striking camera work that characterizes some of the foreign pictures which we have seen, screen technic which Americans disdain to the point of refusing to display it when they should. New York would have been an infinitely better picture if some imagination had been used in depicting the spirit of the city. It needed the master-mind of Erich Pommer to supervise it. He would have made it a notable production. Item number three. Next the punctuation of the titles got on my nerves. A series of questions without question marks and sentences beginning without capital letters, running concurrently with the other weaknesses, were too much for me. I deemed I had done my full duty to the readers of The Spectator by going all the way down town to see the picture, so I oozed myself out past two stout persons and went over to Mullen & Bluett's and purchased some fine woolen socks to keep my ankles warm when I wear my dinner clothes, having discovered that however well silk socks set off my ankles, they do not keep them warm at night after I have worn golf stockings all day. And so to home in a bus which nearly asphyxiated me, an hour in my Ionaco, and then a dinner, principally of finnan haddie, of which I am passing fond, three rubbers of bridge, some writing, many pipes, a dip into

Durant's Story of Philosophy, which Douglas Fairbanks insisted I should read, and to bed. I do not know why Estelle Taylor was murdered, and have only Bill Powell's word as to how it happened, and Bill was such a perfect villain that I think he lied about it. But I don't care. What I saw of the picture made me indifferent to the fate of everyone in it. Bill could have murdered all the characters without having made me forget the woolen socks.

* * *

"Kid Brother" Is a Lloyd Hit

HAROLD Lloyd demonstrates how to do it. I found fault with We're in the Navy Now and Tin Hats on the ground that they were not clever, as comedies should be, and because they were just strings of unrelated gags that had no appeal to a person of intelligence. I maintained that the real comedy must have a connected story and that the gags must be parts of it. And Harold proves it. I rate Kid Brother as a perfect comedy. In the first sequence a story starts and it is not lost sight of until the final fadeout. True, it is a frail story, which is a matter of no importance, for Kid Brother is a situation comedy and the story need be strong enough only to hold together the gags, and this story is quite strong enough for that. And what there is of it is human and clean. Harold, Mary and Doug have been bigger money-makers for a longer period than any other stars and none of them ever appeared in a picture that was not one hundred per cent clean. That should teach the industry something. When you mix a story, cleanliness and brains, a good comedy is the inevitable result. Kid Brother is amazingly clever. The screen gives credit to quite a crowd of people for the story and continuity, and Harold is to be congratulated upon having such a brilliant bunch around him. There are a score of bits in the picture that are the inspirations of geniuses. How any man could think of such an extraordinarily clever thing as putting the big shoes on the monkey quite bewilders me. And I make a deep obeisance to the man who thought of having Harold drive under the branch of the tree to knock the villain unconscious. And those are but two of dozens of bits that were responsible for making my two daughters ashamed of me as I sat between them and howled with glee. Everyone of the bits advanced the story. Therein lies the strength of Kid Brother. Each simply was a scene that advanced the tale the story told. That it happened to be funny was incidental. There is a long time between Lloyd's releases, which can mean only that it takes a long time to make such a picture as Kid Brother. No doubt Paramount, in defending We're in the Navy Now, would argue that it can not take so much time, that releasing obligations must be met. When I pay my money to see a Paramount comedy, I am looking for entertainment. The element of time, releasing dates or studio exigencies do not concern me. I don't care if it took three weeks or three years to make what I am looking at. I wish to see a clever comedy and there can be no excuse for a lack of cleverness. What can't be done well should not be done at all. Quite apart from Kid Brother's strength as a story and a laugh provoker is its merit as a motion picture. Ted Wilde directs it in a manner that is worthy of thoughtful consideration. I often have pointed out the folly of using close-ups when medium shots, or even long shots, could advance the story better. In this

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picture there is abundant evidence of the strength of the contention. Titles are given to characters in long shots and there is no confusion as to who is speaking. Jobyna Ralston in one scene is just a dot in the far background as she puts over her point. In other shots there are several people in the foreground as Harold works effectively in the background. There is a reason for every close-up that is inserted. The grouping is natural. When the camera can not penetrate a crowd to show what is going on in the middle of it, it is raised and looks down on the scene. In my opinion, *Kid Brother* is the best thing that Harold Lloyd ever has done. It is a rattling good comedy and a perfect motion picture.

* * *

Close-Ups Spoil a Good Picture

A DE Fried took his camera up to the mountains of British Columbia and with its lens gathered snowy peaks and valleys and lakes to be spread on the screens of the world. And such pictures! They are in *The Country Beyond*, a Fox production starring Olive Borden, and are the most glorious scenics ever used to help tell a story. They have a rich, velvety tone that adds a dreamy beauty to the majesty of the scenery. As they flitted by me I had the thought that such shots must have great audience appeal in those portions of the country where there are no mountains. There are several shots of a lake with superb mountain scenery in the background. Olive Borden and Ralph Graves paddle their canoes on this lake. The story separates them and after a time lapse Olive, now a great theatrical star, returns to her canoe to find Ralph. He again is paddling on the beautiful lake with the marvelous background. When he sees her coming he is not sure who it is. She knows him and paddles steadily towards him. Finally he recognizes her, waves his paddle and they approach one another rapidly. The audience by this time, of course, is anxious to see the lovers reunited, so the scene has a sentimental as well as a pictorial appeal. If you have not seen the picture you can imagine how exquisitely beautiful such scenes could be—a long shot just close enough to distinguish the boy from the girl, the changing position of the canoes, the boy paddling away, then turning, the waving of the paddles, and the spurt to draw the two canoes together, all the time in the background the sweep of the wonderful scenery which surrounds the lake. But that is not how Irving Cummings shoots it. Oh, no. It's a motion picture, and as Irving is a member in good standing of the directors' club he has to abide by its prescribed rules for presenting scenes. The background is blotted out, the background that Fox sent a company to Canada to get. The majestically romantic setting for a lovers' reunion is wiped from the screen and in its place we have close-ups of Olive and Ralph, notwithstanding the fact that previously we had had far too many of them. There is no establishing shot, nothing to show us the relation of the canoes to each other. We don't know if the characters are one hundred yards apart or eight miles, despite the fact that their relation to one another is the only thing in which the audience is interested. We know they love one another and we wish to see them united, and we are quite willing to look at more of the glorious background. But we have to gaze on one close-up after another, silly, expression-



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less things that tell us nothing. It possibly is the greatest abuse of close-ups that I have seen. The picture itself is quite entertaining and rich in production value. Nor is there any particular lack of merit in the rest of the direction. The high note of the film is the reunion of the lovers and it is ruined by the close-up curse. Evelyn Selbie does a bit in this picture that stands out. She murders her husband, and does it magnificently.

* * *

How They Write About Pictures

FRANCIS X. BUSHMAN, as he relates in a letter published in this issue, raised an interesting point in a speech he made recently in New York, that the screen is suffering from a lack of intelligent, constructive criticism. In the New York Telegraph Herb Cruikshank discusses the matter at some length, the crux of his argument being that the reviewer need not be familiar with the technic of the screen, his mission being to judge by what he sees on the screen whether the picture has entertainment value sufficient to warrant his readers viewing it. "He can only know what he sees," says Mr. Cruikshank. Adding my voice to the general clamor, I would like to express it as my opinion that the trouble with most film critics is that they don't know what they see. I have read many criticisms of *Flesh and the Devil*. All of them are laudatory, but not one of them, in my opinion, reveals that its writer knows why the picture is great. Take our own morning paper critics. Ed Schallert was impressed principally with the passionate love story—yet we have had many other pictures with love stories equally passionate. Louella Parsons, as nearly as I can gather from her somewhat rambling review, seems to be of the opinion that Greta Garbo's acting is the chief merit of the production—yet we had many other pictures revealing better acting. Criticism that is of most value to the layman, of necessity must be of value to the creators of the object criticized, and to others engaged in the creation of similar products. A criticism that says merely that a picture is good or bad is of no value to anyone. Praise of *Flesh and the Devil* is of little value to one who is induced by reading it to view the picture unless it specifically mentions the reasons the picture is praised. General praise is of no value to the motion picture industry, which can profit from criticism only when critics discuss intelligently the features which, in their opinions, make a picture good or bad. A consensus of such opinions would be a valuable guide to the makers of pictures. Stressing an opinion, other than the right one, on the reason for a picture's greatness is a guide which points in the wrong direction. Of course, all any critic can record is his own opinion. Bushman contends that such opinions should be based on more understanding than film critics seem to possess. All competent critics would not draw the same conclusions, but a digest of competent criticisms would give both the public and the industry something of value. I agree with neither of my conferees on the Los Angeles morning papers on the reasons for the greatness of *Flesh and the Devil*, but I do not contend that I am right. I think I am, naturally. Neither the love story nor the acting of Miss Garbo makes this picture perhaps the finest example of screen art ever produced in an American studio. Clarence Brown has made it great by his direction, by his masterly command of

screen technic, by his deep knowledge of human emotions and his wonderful pictorial sense. He treats the great friendship theme sympathetically. The love story and the acting are but the colors he uses to paint his masterpiece. There is nothing in the story itself to make it conspicuous among screen stories. The picture is great because the story is told greatly. And for that, Clarence Brown deserves all the credit.

* * *

When Pigs Become Midnight Kisses

THE screen is so set in its ways that it is tiresome. Anything in the way of novelty would be welcome. John Golden produced in New York a play that was presented to the public with a name that would intrigue even a blase theatre-goer—*Pigs*. No doubt the title contributed its share towards the success of the production. Fox bought it for screen purposes to capitalize the advertising the play got. And he applied screen methods to it. No one had produced a picture named "Horses", "Cows", "Sheep" or "Goats", therefore it would be impossible for one called "Pigs" to make money. The intriguing title, one with real box office value because of its novelty, was discarded and the utterly meaningless one of *The Midnight Kiss* substituted. No doubt the Fox sales force thought the title had a passionate ring to it and that as love and kisses are standard screen fare it would be risky business to do anything novel. In the aggregate I suppose the title, *The Midnight Kiss*, kept millions of people away from houses showing the picture as there were no names connected with the production strong enough in themselves to attract patronage, and such a title would suggest only another picture of standard screen love stuff. Of course the advertising value which Fox bought was a total loss. To make the venture still more unprofitable a poor picture was made from the good play. It so easily could have been made an outstanding picture. Al Cohn wrote a satisfactory adaptation, no doubt relying on Irving Cummings, the director, to make the picture rich in atmosphere and characterization. Cummings did not do this. The grandmother, a hypochondriac and a poet were overdrawn so much that they were out of place among the real people on the screen, consequently every scene in which one or more of them appeared was not entertaining and served only to retard the story. The audience was interested only in the efforts of the two young people, played delightfully by Janet Gaynor and Richard Walling, first to raise money to purchase the pigs, and then to cure them and make a profit. But we have to sit through much footage of utterly ridiculous and childish antics of a cranky grandmother, an ass of a son and a fool of a poet, not one of whom contributes one foot to what the story is about. So much footage was wasted in this way that there was not enough left to permit the story to be told properly. The screen is woefully shy of clever characterizations, but before an attempt be made to provide it the people undertaking it should have some idea what it means. No matter how clever a characterization may be of itself, there is no room in a picture for it unless it be part of the story. We do not need talking grandmothers simply because they are supposed to be funny. What we need are real characterizations by the people whose actions tell the story. In *The Midnight Kiss* no effort whatever was made to

characterize two fathers who were part of the story. They are simply screen fathers, but we are given extravagant characterizations of two younger men for whose presence on the screen there is no excuse whatever. Consequently *The Midnight Kiss* drags wearily, and what might have been a very good picture is a tiresome one. Janet and young Walling, though, are fine. Delightful stories could be written for such a clever team. But it would be no use. Lots of delightful stories are being written now, but the treatment they get when produced knocks all the delight out of them. Before I leave this picture I would like to say that Doris Lloyd is one of the most charming young mothers whom I have seen on the screen. She has a sweet and wholesome personality and is restful to the eyes.

* * *

This One Has a Lot of Blemishes

SOME day an author is going to write a comedy clever enough for even a supervisor to be able to grasp its possibilities, and if the impossibilities continue to happen, it will be made into a picture that will have no comedians in it. It will be that kind of a comedy—funny because the funny things in it happen to ordinary people and not to freaks. *Footloose Widows* was intended to be such a comedy. Unfortunately only the intention reached the screen. It has everything except a good story and capable direction. Among the funny people on the screen you would not class Jacqueline Logan, Jason Robards, John Miljan and Douglas Gerrard, yet they take part in many scenes that would have been amusing if the whole thing had not been so silly. Darryll Zanuck apparently wrote a poor story and Roy Del Ruth made it worse by his direction. When you see a pretty girl faint in a man's arms on the porch of an hotel without attracting the attention of guests sitting near, not even a glance turning in her direction, you can not rate the direction very highly. Gerrard trips over Louise Fazenda's foot, falls gracefully to the ground and is unconscious for a long time afterwards, although he does not fall on his head or lose possession of his monocle. Such things happen in two-reelers, but scarcely belong in features that constitute the principal part of an evening's entertainment. The picture is so full of such absurdities that it is interesting only because it prompts conjectures as to how it could display such brainlessness. It has a rich setting and deals with smart people and to have had any merit should have been done cleverly. But we can thank it for giving us a Louise Fazenda in decent clothes. She shows what an excellent actress she is. Gerrard also does splendidly. For a few issues I have been soft peddling on the punctuation of titles, but there are so many crimes committed in this Warner Brothers offering that I can not pass over them in silence. There is one title which says, "You've got the wrong idea, honey. Find a man with money. You can always love." This is how it reads, "You've got the wrong idea, honey—find a man with money, you can always love." Another says, "What do you mean? Got what?" But it says it this way, "What do you mean,—got what?" These are examples of scores of exhibitions of illiteracy which the titles in *Footloose Widows* contain. Surely there is someone in the Warner organization with an ordinary education. I have received letters written by its stenographers which reveal that the girls had been

to school. Why punctuate properly a letter intended only for one person and send out such evidence of gross ignorance to millions of people throughout the world? Why advertise the fact that people in Hollywood with authority to pass on titles are hopelessly uneducated? Why persist in limiting the appeal of pictures to mentalities as low as those that make them? "Who the hell knows anything about punctuation?" Jack Warner once asked me. There you have the answer to all the questions. Like most of our picture people, he assumes that what he does not know, no one knows.

* * *

Can't Build Drama On Faulty Premises

TIME was when even American girls asked their parents' consent before they married. But it isn't done now. Society has progressed beyond the age of consent, and the custom is as dead as if it never had been. A scene in a screen play based on something no longer done is not a good scene. By no possibility does it ring true. In *Remember*, a passable little story written by Dorothy Howell for Columbia and made into a screen play by J. Grubb Alexander, one of the big scenes is one in which Earl Metcalfe asks Dorothy Phillips' consent to his marriage with her sister. He is dubious about asking her and is relieved greatly when she consents. There is good drama in the scene, for Dorothy herself loves him and thinks that Metcalfe is about to propose to her. The fact that he asks for her sister's hand is a great blow to her, and she acts the scene well. But there is no sincerity in the scene, for it is not based on a logical idea. The audience knows that no girl is going to allow her sister to choose a husband for her, and the best acting in the world can not make such a scene plausible. The moment you get away from plausibility in drama you lose drama. And the screen writer never is faced with the necessity of sacrificing plausibility to get drama. No matter what the scene, there is a way to present it plausibly. In this picture the scene would have been stronger if Dorothy Phillips had been looking from her window and had seen Metcalfe putting the ring on Lola Todd's finger. That would provide Dorothy with an opportunity to play a strong scene alone, which, in itself, is a strong way to play a scene. There was no necessity for the introduction of the faulty premise that the elder sister's consent had to be obtained. This is demonstrated amply, without needing demonstration, in a later sequence when the younger sister elopes with someone else, the older sister hearing about it only after it is over. If Lola had to get Dorothy's consent to marry one man, how can you justify her action when she runs away with another without consent? I review elsewhere in this issue a Sam Bischoff production, a good dog picture with a dreadful title, *The Snarl of Hate*. In it the guardian of a red-blooded American girl tells her that he has promised her to his partner. The audience is asked to consider that good drama, to accept the premise that a guardian of a girl who is of age can promise her in marriage to anyone whom he selects. Such dramatic lapses do not occur only in our smaller pictures. You see things similar to them in the productions of the big studios. Before a director begins to build drama in a scene he should ask himself if the scene is logical in itself. As I point out in my review, the direction of *The Snarl of Hate* is, on the whole, creditable, but if

the director had asked himself the obvious question, "Do guardians, in this day and age, give away their wards?", he would have seen at once that there was no logic in the situation, and would have put over the point in some other way.

* * *

Comedy Should Be Correct as Drama

ONE advantage a comedy like *The Lunatic at Large* has over such a one as *We're in the Navy Now* is that it has no technical responsibilities. It has no standardized or established locales or rules of conduct. The navy picture, although frankly a slap-stick farce, is under obligations to be true to naval traditions and regulations. At least I suppose it is. Farce, to have any particular point, must have some sensible background. What fun there is in the antics of Beery and Hatton is due solely to the fact that serious-minded people are the victims of them. If all those appearing in the picture were such impossible asses as the two comedians there would be nothing to laugh at. The comedians are funny in the degree that the people surrounding them are normal. On this reasoning, as much care should have been exercised in making the picture technically correct as would have been expended on the technicalities of a drama with the same locale. If the navy picture had taken itself as seriously as a farce should, it scarcely would have shown naval officers wearing dress uniforms and fore-and aft plumed hats—whatever they are called—in war times. I doubt if a large cargo of explosives would have been carried on a transport, but I know that if it had been it would have been battened down, not stacked loosely to be toppled over by the first two-foot wave the vessel encountered. And I am dead sure that no ship carried an old fashioned torch such as *We're in the Navy Now* features. General alarms were sounded by the ship's bell, siren or whistle and they summoned the crew to stand by to abandon ship, which meant that each man went to the post previously assigned to him and rubbed in by daily drills. In the picture they go almost as far as sounding an individual alarm for each sailor, and the crew lines up on deck, perhaps to be as far as possible from the life-boats when the torpedo strikes. Beery and Hatton lower a life-boat and row away from the densely populated ship without being seen, an utterly impossible thing for them to do. *We're in the Navy Now* is cleaning up a wad of money for Famous Players-Lasky, but I contend its profits would be larger if it had made a greater appeal to intelligent people by eliminating its technical absurdities and showing a strict regard for naval practices. A simpler

system of producing farce-comedies would be to make them indefinite as to locale, which would give the technical men as much freedom of expression as the scenarists.

* * *

I saw an exquisite two-reeler the other day, *The Owl Witch*, produced in Technicolor by J. C. Casler and having an all-Indian cast. Every shot is a gorgeous picture, but the action moves swiftly and the story never loses its interest. Shots that would have been drab in black and white are gloriously beautiful in this little gem. When color becomes the rule, instead of the exception, on the screen the task of finding attractive locations will be simplified greatly. Any location, properly lighted, will produce a masterpiece of art. Quite apart from its wealth of coloring and its extraordinary pictorial value, *The Owl Witch* is a tribute to William Bertram's ability as a screen writer and director, for he wrote the story from an old Indian legend and directed it. He has a rare sense of both composition and drama and a series of such pictures as this should make him famous. The photography of Edward T. Estabrook deserves great praise. There is nothing that the screen needs as much as it needs two-reel subjects with entertainment value. *The Owl Witch* would be the high spot of almost any program.

* * *

An evening's delightful entertainment is provided by *Applesauce* at the Egan theatre. Neely Edwards has deserted the screen for the time being to play the leading part and he gives a very able performance. The only motion pictures in which I have seen him have been terrible two-reelers. In *Applesauce* he plays a high comedy part in a thoroughly capable manner. The play is well constructed, is human and funny, and the lines contain some sound philosophy that will appeal to those old fashioned people who like to think when they go to the theatre. Frank Egan's direction is very good, except in the instance of the characterization of a politician who has attained power and riches without learning that when he enters the residence of an acquaintance and converses with women in the living-room a man usually removes his hat. This character keeps his on, even when introduced to women, which spoils his scenes and mars an otherwise perfectly presented comedy.

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The titles in *Old Ironsides* are punctuated in a manner that I would term perfect. It is a Paramount picture. Both the East Coast and West Coast Paramount studios never followed the same system of punctuation in any of their other productions. They use dashes where they should use periods, begin sentences with small letters and omit to use interrogation marks where they belong. I



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would term such a system imperfect. Paramount itself can not claim that both systems are perfect. If Rupert Hughes used the proper punctuation in the Old Ironsides titles, then all the rest of the Paramount punctuation must be improper. The reverse also is true. Look at it in any way you like and you can not escape the conclusion that Paramount confesses that it has blundered. I have been told by people in the Lasky studio here that my campaign against incorrect punctuation is ridiculous because the screen has a system of its own. If such be the case, why wasn't the system used in Old Ironsides?

* * *

In Footloose Widows Douglas Gerrard is characterized as a titled English gentleman, an aristocrat who should have punctilious regard for social conventions. He calls on two girls in the sitting-room of their suite in a fashionable hotel. He does not remove his hat when he enters the room, and keeps it on while he is conversing with the girls. Some day when a director makes an actor go through a scene like that, something is going to happen to him, and when they clear away the things the actor throws at him, they are going to find the director dead. The jury that hears the case will elect the actor honorary foreman, take him into the jury room and during the ensuing celebration everyone will get soused.

* * *

Apropos of some comments elsewhere in this issue on the subject of film criticism in newspapers, I would like to remark that by long odds the most significant, as well as the most interesting, feature of Hotel Imperial is the fact that it is the first picture made in this country under the supervision of Erich Pommer, possessor of the greatest picture mind in the world. To those engaged in making pictures that aspect of Hotel Imperial outweighed in importance all others, but The Spectator seems to be the only publication that realized it and which reviewed the picture with that thought in mind. The Spectator's review appeared some weeks ago, after the picture was previewed.

* * *

In Subway Sadie Dorothy Mackaill reveals herself as a painstaking actress. Making herself look so unattractive must have been the result of prolonged and intensive consideration. Possessing features that essentially need the softening influence of the arrangement of her hair,

she chooses in this picture to slick back her hair in a way that robs her of all her beauty. The beauty of a screen actress belongs to the public as much as does her art, and she has no right to tamper with either unless playing a character part that demands it. Dorothy's friends should advise her that she is making a big mistake by affecting such extremes.

* * *

Fox bought Pigs and named the picture made from it The Midnight Kiss. Towards the end of the picture a title gives the significance of the midnight kiss. The main title of a production is supposed to have box office value, to be an instrument for drawing an audience into a theatre. How can a title have box office value if the audience has to pay its way into a theatre before it can find out what the title means? And once in, what financial difference does it make whether the title is explained or not? Another of the funny things about pictures.

* * *

In Everybody's Acting Louise Dresser is characterized as an educated, dynamic woman of great power in the industrial world. There is an insert of a letter written by her. One need not be a hand-writing expert to observe that the letter was written by someone with no force of character, that by no chance could it have been written by such a woman as Miss Dresser is characterized. You see the same blunder in a great many pictures. They bear testimony to the industry's inability to think.

* * *

I ran across Ham Beall the other night for the first time since I roasted him good and plenty in The Spectator. He was sore. I had spelled his name with only one "l" and I agreed with him that that was enough to make anyone sore.

* * *

When you stop to consider that it cost as much to make Old Ironsides as it did to build the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel, then in turn look at Old Ironsides and at the Biltmore, you do some wondering.

* * *

In Remember Dorothy Phillips and Lola Todd play sisters. Efficient casting, for they look remarkably alike.

* * *

We really should have another war. The stock shots of the last one are about worn out.

AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — The Spectator's 16-Year-Old Critic

AT LAST I have seen a foreign picture I did not enjoy, and I have seen all of them except Faust and The Waltz Dream. This foreign picture which I did not enjoy was Michael Strogoff. The main character, Michael Strogoff, played by Ivan Moskine, wasn't dashing and romantic enough to get any sympathy for himself. As far as that goes, none of the cast established sympathy for himself as he should have. The hero, Moskine, was much more acceptable after he grew a beard than he had been before when he was smooth-shaven, except for his little moustache. There was something

queer about his eyes; one apparently was more widely open than the other, giving him a slightly cock-eyed expression. That wasn't so noticeable when he grew all his facial alfalfa.

THE czar, who sent the message which Strogoff nearly lost his health delivering, didn't know what he was doing, because he should have sent a dozen messengers by as many different routes to his brother, instead of only one. That weakened the story, because the entire plot of the story wasn't very logical. The plot was in the sending of the mes-

senger by the czar, who didn't do that logically, therefore the plot was illogical. To add to that there was the love story. A picture should have either no love story or it should have a good one. The love story in Michael Strogoff was nothing, practically. The two principals were never very enthusiastic about it, perhaps because they were as cold and inhuman as I have ever seen anyone on the screen. The development of the love story was too sudden to be good. Those two big weaknesses were too much for the rest of the picture to overcome.

M.-G.-M. very nearly set a record in the Demi-Bride, but the last part of the picture kept them from it. The record was that of the world's silliest picture. The best feature of the picture was Joe Farnham's

titles. He started off with a few witty wise-cracks, but he got down to serious work long before the rest of the picture did. His titles are remarkable for their good punctuation and general merit. The picture was divided so distinctly into two parts that it was noticeable even to the audience. The first part of the picture was as silly as it well could be without driving the audience away. The second part was more like what is to be expected from Robert Z. Leonard. It is a significant fact that there was much more laughter at the more serious part than there was at the silly, slap-stick stuff.

THERE is a saying that it never rains but it pours. Up until a few days ago I had never seen Betty Bronson on the screen, but had missed all her pictures, by some peculiar circumstance. Then I saw her in *Paradise for Two* one night and in *Everybody's Acting* the next afternoon. She has a good personality, in fact, a splendid one, but I don't believe she can act. Just so long as she remains natural and doesn't try to act, she will be a success on the screen. Of her two performances, the one in *Paradise for Two* was the better, although *Everybody's Acting* was by far a better picture. *Paradise for Two* was really starring Richard Dix, but I was more interested in the girl. The picture rated about average, not being good or bad. The chief feature of *Paradise for Two* was its rather new story.

OCCASIONALLY some director makes his own story and a good picture usually results. The only thing which prevents this kind of picture from being a success is that sometimes the director's brain-child is so weird no one can understand it. Marshall Neilan is billed as having made *Everybody's Acting* from his own story. A good picture resulted. His story was the type that I myself like, perhaps that was why I enjoyed the picture so much. Maybe the story didn't appeal to dad; it probably won't appeal to a lot of people. I imagine that the story reflected the personality of Neilan himself, and his personality might be disliked by a lot of people. Anybody's personality is bound to be disliked by someone. However, the picture is a great argument in favor of shooting stories just as the author wrote them.

DOG pictures are peculiar. As a rule they have more inconsistencies than any other feature-length pictures. The whole idea of them is wrong, because there is no dog on earth that will reason as these motion picture dogs do. A dog and his actions in a picture should be subordinated to those of the human actors, because a dog can't register emotions, and emotions are what people go to see on the screen. However, *The Snarl of Hate* is a very fine dog picture. If it would only shed its atrocious title, it would be one of the

best ever made. Johnnie Walker, who co-starred with Silverstreak, gave fine performances in two different parts. He is one of the most human young men in pictures. He also has another distinction; he is the only man in pictures who can throw a stick for a dog in front of the camera without looking like an idiot.

THE *Snarl of Hate* had a lot of mistakes in it; all dog pictures, as I said before, have. The worst one was in a title, and can be changed quite easily. The heavy promises his ward to his partner. The ward, played by Mildred June, announces to her guardian and his partner that she is going out with Walker. The guardian says, "Do you think that is right when I have promised you to him?" This was said right in front of both the girl and the partner. It's not the general custom for guardians to give their wards away in marriage to their partners when the wards' inclinations run in another direction. That one poor title stuck out like a sore thumb in an otherwise good set of titles. The rest of the faults were too numerous to mention. They were all little things and didn't interfere much with the good part of the picture. There were some fine shots of the desert, which will rather alter the general conception of the desert as nothing but miles and miles of sand.

ONE of the reasons why dad's criticisms are so good is because he always tells WHY he likes or dislikes something. Henceforth that is to be my policy. *Summer Bachelors* was good. The following are the reasons. Although I do not know, *Summer Bachelors* looked as if it had been made with very close attention to the story of the book. The book, written by Warner Fabian, was a success, presumably. Naturally, if the picture was following the book closely enough, it would be as popular as the book. One thing I liked particularly about the picture was its lightness. There were no very serious scenes, and the rival didn't try to shoot Alan Forrest when he got the girl. Another good thing about this picture was the newcomer who was introduced, Lelia Hyams I think her name was. Madge Bellamy turned in a good performance, as did the rest of the cast.

EVERYBODY has at one time or another read some of Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories. The absurdity of his stuff is somewhat glossed over by his literary style, but when his stories get on the screen, their silliness is too apparent. F. B. O. just made one of his stories, *Tarzan and the Golden Lion*. The golden lion was the best part of the picture, as he was one of the best trained animals I have ever seen on the screen. He wasn't one of the old, toothless lions which are so prevalent in pictures; he had all his teeth and was certainly fierce-looking. He must have been well trained because all of the cast seemed to get away with

their health. Outside of the lion, the picture was pretty feeble, because *Tarzan* was a disappointment. He was bound to be, because no man on earth can do the things attributed to *Tarzan*. The *Tarzan* in this picture had to run along the ground instead of the trees.

TARZAN may have been a disappointment in the trees, but that boy sure could run on the ground. He ran everywhere, and apparently was never out of breath. The running in this picture was one of the main reasons why it was a poor picture. No one ever walked anywhere; everybody ran like Nurmi's fondest dreams. *Tarzan*, who was supposed to know every smell of the jungle by heart, let somebody lose the trail for him. Of course, he had to come back to get a new start. When he got home, he found his overseer knocked out by an outlaw. In spite of the fact that the overseer was just recovering from the effects of the blow, *Tarzan* made him go hunt somebody, while he himself hunted someone else. As usual, they started out at a run. The fact that he might take a horse never occurred to the overseer. About half a dozen assorted faults like the ones mentioned made the picture a poor one.

AS A RULE, I don't like crook pictures. They have such a gloomy, dark atmosphere. However, I did enjoy *Going Crooked*, George Melford's picture. *Bessie Love* was so good in it that it would be a success anyway, no matter what else was the matter with it. The title of the picture is atrocious; it sounds like the titles you see on some of the ten and fifteen year old pictures which are shown around at the various neighborhood houses occasionally. The plot of the story was as old as the hills, but it was made in a rather different way from the usual crook plays. There was the usual master mind of the big gang of crooks. Gustav von Seyffertitz gave one of his usual brilliant performances as the master-mind. There was plenty of good action in the picture, which was, on the whole, a very pleasing little piece of work.

AFTER viewing *The Flaming Forest*, I was a bit suspicious of James Oliver Curwood, and wasn't overly enthusiastic about going to see *The Country Beyond*. However, there was nothing to worry about, for *The Country Beyond* was a decidedly entertaining picture. There were some mistakes, of course; no picture is without those. *The Country Beyond* was like *The Temptress* in that it was what I call a well-rounded picture. There was everything in it, beautiful scenery, action, good acting, and even big sets. The last scenes were ruined by unnecessary close-ups. The picture should have ended at a long shot of the two canoes containing the man and the girl coming together. This shot was taken through some trees

VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

BEGONE, MODESTY!

(The Spectator has been the recipient of some hundreds of letters and notes containing most flattering comments on it as a publication. As we felt that they were intended only for the editor, we have not published them, although some of the greatest names in the industry were attached to some of them. But what are we going to do when we get such a letter as we publish below? Francis X. Bushman wrote it for publication and we do not like to disappoint him, which, however, is not our main reason for making it public. We are prompted by our ego to let you know what Frank thinks about us.)

My dear Mr. Beaton:

I believe you hold a unique position in our industry and in these United States. I am going to prove it.

A month ago, I was the guest at a luncheon in New York given by the A. M. P. A. The unexpected presence of Paul Myer, editor of The Theatre Magazine, caused me to change the talk that I had originally outlined. As an actor and a veteran of the screen, I felt it a happy moment to defend my profession.

I prefaced my remarks by stating that I had enjoyed (?) the positions of producer, author, adapter, director, star, title writer and cutter, all in one. I recalled a conversation I had with the late Wm. Winter in which he stated "the office of the critic was always constructive." I was a stock leading man at the time, and his remarks were confined to the critics of the legitimate stage. He said that "unless a critic knew play construction, the back stage, the limitations of the stage and the actor, and unless

and was beautiful. But the picture went on in order to show the final close-up of the two of them kissing each other. The same old stuff.

SUBWAY SADIE is the most uninteresting picture I have seen in the past six months. It was not so absolutely bad as some I have seen; it was just deadly uninteresting. It dragged on and on in a series of close-ups which meant absolutely nothing. The plot was ancient and tottering with old age. The heroine could sell clothes to anybody after all the other girls had given up hope, and the subway guard turned out to be a rich man after all. Old stuff, every bit of it. Jack Mulhall does better and better work all the time, but a good performance from him in Subway Sadie isn't enough to make it a good picture. There was absolutely no reason for the title, because she had nothing to do with the subway except that she rode in it. They might just as well have called it Taxi Tessie, as she rode in the taxi as much or more than she did in the subway.

he could point out a play's weak spots and suggest a remedy—he did not belong."

I then said every professional man had to serve an apprenticeship, that the actor began with a foundation of reading which would include the historians, dramatists, poets, philosophers, and contemporary writers of fiction, to give him a background—a basis of analysis. In addition, voice culture and acting to learn how to act.

But, I said, it is almost impossible to find a critic of motion pictures who knows enough of the complex ramifications of a photoplay before it reaches the screen, to intelligently place the blame for a bad picture. I went on to explain that, in the old days, the director or the star was held responsible, but that to-day is the day of specialists, each one capable of making or ruining a picture. The least responsible agency for a picture's failure was the actor.

Citing D. W. Griffith and Von Stroheim, who can make a cigar store Indian act, I said what then should be the result if even a mediocre director has under him actors of experience and proven ability. I more or less heatedly accused these incompetent critics of ruining the reputations of stars and seasoned players because they did not know enough to place the blame where it belonged.

I suggested they study picture-making at close range, that they would then discover that the author, the adapter, the scenarist, the director, the camera man, the title writer, the cutter, the director-general, the combined verdict of the executives, and, last and least of all, the actor, might be responsible for the picture's failure. At some length I showed them how it was possible for a good director to save a weak story, a good cutter to save a weak director and story, et cetera, et cetera, but insisted that a greater familiarity and closer study would enlighten them

regarding the office of each of these departments. Perhaps my long association with pictures has developed a keener instinct for these things, but I said I could not understand how they dared criticize a picture without this fundamental knowledge.

Had No Axe to Grind

I explained I had no axe to grind, but felt toward them as did a great man who said of his persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

These remarks were not only intended for Mr. Myer, but also that the A. M. P. A., who were purveyors of valuable advertising space, might demand of the managing editors a higher type of men and women to review the screen material, to the end that all might be benefitted by really intelligent criticism.

Now, I have noted "In silence and at night", when reviewing the reviewers, you stand alone in throwing the searchlight of truth on what is a midnight of darkness to others. That, by the process of ratiocination, you consider the author's original intent, the adapter's understanding of same, the director's mental equipment, the camera man's understanding of dramatic coloring—if I may call it such—to the brilliant, hackneyed or ungrammatical subtitles, the sense of dramatic values or ignorance of tempo of the cutter.

Says Kind Things

Kinder, more just, no man has been than you, in judging the player's performance. For example, you have stood and watched a director insist on his conception of the part, leaving nothing to and asking nothing of the actor's intelligence, until the finished product resembles nothing so much as a painting of many personalities by the use of one only model. Again, you have witnessed splendid direction, only to have the star or the producer cut the picture to allow for longer close-ups of the star, sacrificing real entertainment and story values.

I believe I have proven my point. Your close study of your subject and

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keen sense of the fitness of things have, indeed, placed you in an enviable position in Hollywood—the Home of Photoplays. Perhaps that is as it should be. We boast a critic who is competent to criticize, to analyze, dissect, carve out each one's responsibility, with courage enough to place the blame. The repetition in the foregoing is intentional.

May the balmy airs of California prolong your valuable life. Selah.

FRANCIS X. BUSHMAN.

P. S.—I consider your "Remarks on Hugging Another Man's Wife" a classic. (January 22nd issue.) The Spectator is proving a real service to the industry. F. X.

SHIRT SLEEVES

Dear Mr. Beaton:

I most heartily agree with your remarks in your last issue that our picture producers make most ridiculous mistakes in presenting English social life on the screen.

I have done my part, not entirely unsuccessfully, in preventing these mistakes, ever since I took up the work of technical adviser when I had the good fortune to be associated with Mr. Lubitsch in that capacity during the filming of "Lady Windemere's Fan".

I was Mr. Edwin Carewe's technical adviser on the picture to which you refer, evidently *High Steppers*. I feel sure that you can not have followed the preceding scene which led up to that in which Lloyd Hughes "sits in his shirt sleeves and wearing a vest while he has tea with Mary Astor."

Even the most refined English gentleman, living in a cheap London lodging house, when he discovers water pouring on to his bed from the ceiling above, will not trouble to put on his coat, having already taken it off to wash his hands, before hurrying upstairs to discover the cause of the flood. He then discovers that it

is the carelessness of his very beautiful fellow lodger, Mary Astor, who has allowed her wash-basin to overflow. He is greeted with profuse apologies and a friendly invitation to accept a share of the frugal supper she is preparing. He does not think it necessary, being just an Oxford undergraduate trying to get along, to do anything but accept then and there, dressed as he is.

I admit that most directors would have made him change into full evening dress and wear a gardenia in his buttonhole, when having supper with the leading lady, but we wanted to make a picture of English life.

Kindest personal regards.

GERALD GROVE.

(The act of an aristocratic young Englishman having tea with a refined girl while he wears a vest and no coat is an inconsistency that can not be excused on the score of how it happened. Such a youth, carefully planted as belonging to the best social set, would have returned to his room on the floor below and donned his coat. Well bred people do the correct thing by instinct. The action of this young man was contrary to social conventions, consequently was out of place in a picture dealing with conventional society. A technical director who defends such an exhibition of lowbrowism is at fault.)

A LETTER FROM BOSTON

My dear Mr. Beaton:

The number of *The Spectator* with your interesting estimate of the Vitaphone and its probable value in the amusement field, had an especial interest for me, for while I do not altogether agree with you as to its present worth, I do think it will be developed, now that the problem of synchronization has been solved. The same program that you commented upon is now being given at one of the legitimate theatres in this city, and I mailed you a day or two ago the opinion of one of the leading Boston reviewers. To me its especial appeal was that most of the talking was done by the people upon the screen, rather than by the audience, a relief, as well as a novelty.

Can you advance any reason why the exhibitors make no especial effort to eliminate talking and unnecessary noises in their audiences? It

has reached a point with me that I actually am like the man who was going out with the announced intention of getting drunk, "And, gosh, how I dread it." I make it a rule to attend what is technically known as the supper show, for the reason that the audiences are smaller, and the liability of disturbance therefore less, but even then, it is seldom that I find myself in an audience where my attention is not distracted by conversation or paper rustling.

It utterly spoils a film for me, and I know personally many people who prefer to stay away rather than be so annoyed. And the peculiar thing about it is that the exhibitors seem to be unaware of this feeling on the part of a considerable number, or if they are aware of it they are indifferent to it. They have it in their hands to make this sort of thing so unpopular and the offenders the subject of so much ridicule, that the thing could be wiped out in a year, the country over, and its influence would extend to every audience for whatever purpose assembled.

Suppose that every time you went into a picture show, you should see flashed upon the screen, somewhat after the fashion of "Topics of the Day," some little paragraph about it, or suppose some of the big exhibitors like Publix were to offer a prize of say \$1,000, for the best article on the subject, and the winning article was then shown upon their screens, how long do you think it would be before it would be made apparent to the offenders that they were unpopular and ignorant? Not long, I'll warrant you. I hope to live long enough to see it.

FRANK E. HATCH.

A LETTER FROM NEW YORK

Editor, *The Spectator*:

I very much enjoyed reading several copies of your paper, and am about decided to subscribe for it. But I feel that have a justifiable complaint. You see, some of us are critics,

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too. I am sure you will take this in good spirit.

What I mean, is that I am surprised that a man of your seeming shrewdness, and psychology - sense, would so far go wrong as to publish the opinions (or claimed-to-be opinions) of your own young son in your magazine. If a boy's opinions be published at all,—and I think they will be shown occasionally,—they should not be printed, certainly, unless they ring true as the sort of stuff the average boy—he is the one we are concerned with—would think and write. It should not be the trite remarks of a child who has been too much in movie-adult-critic atmosphere to ring true.

And above all, if a sixteen-year-old's opinions be given, the last person in the world who should appear in the magazine, is the editor's own son, thus announced. Immediately the reader feels antagonistic—"What is this that is being put over on him? This editor cooks up something to advertise his kid."—in the very nature of it, nobody would believe the thing wasn't hokum, be the editor ever so sincere. I should think you would know human psychology well enough for that. But you have, being a parent, failed to note that the brilliancy of kids in general is noted almost always only by the parents. It bores the rest of the world.

Now if your column ran the unedited opinions of six different children, boys and girls, well and good. But I have lost confidence in your sincerity by that faux pas of yours—I am only human you see. No sixteen-year-old boy ever wrote that stuff, not all of it at least, or else he is such a rubber-stamp of the old block that he isn't worth using as a typical kid. What real boy ever uses these expressions, trite, adult-movie-critic's oldest stuff:

(Too many quotations to publish.—W. B.)

Now, Mr. Editor, that last one especially — the crack at the woman haters. Heaven deliver us from a boy as sophisticated as that remark. A real kid would never have noticed, nor remarked on that phase at all, unless he was fairly drowned in the opinions of his elders, and had never had a chance to be himself. Take my word for it, if your boy is like that, have him looked over before it is too late. That remark showed an abnormal boy not following the show, but thinking past it, back into the director's mind and actions, with a half-sneer. Rotten stuff for a boy of that age. We want their reactions to the story—not their sarcasm, adult-copied, of the actors and directors.

We like a healthy, unspoiled kid who can sit down to a meal, and boyishly swallow the whole thing with zest, from soup to nuts, and hardly know what he is eating, except to know good from bad. He would be a poor kid indeed, who would sit back, and toy with the dish, figuring out just how it was made, and what errors

the cook perpetrated in the cooking. That is for us elders, alas, who have lost youthful zest. But not for kids.

Your boy is natural when he says, in a boy's funny language,—so enjoyable because it is so un-literate, as all sixteen year olds should still be—

"It is nothing that you remember very long for its funniness."

Unfortunately, such remarks from him have for the most part been thoroughly edited out, or else he is abnormal. If his abnormality is too much brilliancy, it is still disagreeable to anyone but his fond parents,—just as if it were too much nose, for instance, instead of not quite enough. One's as pitable as the other.

Let us hear from a real kid. And don't get sore. I have been a teacher in high school English for years, I am now in scenario-assistant work in movies, I have done editing on magazines. So I am not all in the fog. The great mob would perhaps believe a normal kid wrote that stuff—but you can't fool the small percent who know children. Why not give us some real, boy's stuff? And not too often, nor too much of it at a time.

With all good intentions,
E. E. SORENSEN.

New York.

DONALD MAKES REPLY

Dear Dad:

Mr. E. E. Sorensen, former high school teacher of English, has gone to the trouble to write all the way from New York to tell me I am abnormal. I must say that in my abnormality I have a companion, the all-wise Sorensen himself. He says he has been a high-school teacher of English, and he is abnormal because he has gone through that experience without finding out how to punctuate yet. Mr. Sorensen had better not try to come out here and teach English, because in the West you have to know more than your pupils to teach.

For instance, he says, "I have been a teacher in high school English for years, I am now in scenario-assistant work in movies, I have done editing on magazines." If a fourteen-year-old student made a mistake like that out here, he'd get it in the neck. That is what we call a "baby blunder". The poor man absolutely forgot his semicolons, which belonged in there. Instead, he put commas. Also, Mr. Sorensen coined a new word, "un-lit-

erate". I had always imagined that there was only one word which could express what he wanted to, and that word was "illiterate". He doubts that I write my own stuff myself; I doubt that he wrote that letter himself. No former English teacher could make so many infantile mistakes.

The studio which employs Mr. Sorensen should give him more work to do, because he seems to find time to sit and write letters across the continent. He knows much about boys' minds; I will admit that. He ought to, having one himself. I think it's just jealousy on his part; he doesn't like to see another sixteen-year-old getting his stuff printed.

I'll tell him one thing: I don't like the job very much. He can have it any time he wants it. I would just love to have him come and "boyishly swallow" his food, while I sit back and pick the cook to pieces. Of course, he would have to eat that way, because, according to him, the way you eat influences the way you write. He has sealed my doom; I can never become a writer. I can't wolf down everything in sight on the table, because I have athletic aspirations, and am in training most of the time.

Mr. Sorensen is right about my not being original. Perhaps Mr. Sorensen's father used good English and punctuation. Just to be original, Mr. Sorensen doesn't. I would rather fall in with the common herd which does, than write a letter like this one. But cheer up, Mr. Sorensen! We have schools out here which teach English to all languages, including the Scandinavian.

DONALD.

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For Tired Minds==

Less than an hour away from San Diego, on the Los Angeles side, there is a tract of land, more than five hundred and fifty acres in extent. It was owned by a man, now dead, who had an eye for beauty when he selected it and a regard for comfort when he developed it into a country estate.

There are great live oaks on it, their gnarled limbs stretched out like the arms of benediction of ancient Druids blessing the landscape that rolls beneath them. There are pepper trees that drape lacy branches above the mirror of a stream that never dries.

All Southern California's beauty is represented within the boundaries of this estate, and its horizon is formed by the dreamy hills of Mexico and our own country.

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IN THIS NUMBER

————— 0 —————

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF CINEMA ARTS

————— 0 —————

M.-G.-M. AND ITS COLLECTION OF WRITERS

————— 0 —————

TOO MUCH VALUE ATTACHED TO NAMES

————— 0 —————

DIRECTORS AND THE CLOSE-UP CURSE

————— 0 —————

MAKING THE MOST OF DRAMATIC SCENES

————— 0 —————

NORMA TALMADGE IN A SUPERB PICTURE

————— 0 —————

"ROOKIES" IS AN ENTERTAINING COMEDY

————— 0 —————

MONTE BLUE SPLENDID IN "THE BRUTE"

————— 0 —————

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THINK about motion pictures.*

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To Teach the Art of Making Pictures

ONE OF THE series of valuable articles on the art of making motion pictures which Alfred Hustwick wrote for *The Spectator* a few months ago, advocated the establishment of a university devoted solely to teaching all branches of picture production. In this country to-day a young man has a wide choice of a school to teach him how to roll a pill, build a bridge, try a law suit or preach a sermon. I believe there also are barber colleges which teach people how to cut hair. The picture industry is the fourth largest in the country and there is not one school which a student can attend to learn how pictures are made. That the screen has reached a stage of demanding that something be done to remedy the situation is demonstrated by the activity in picture classes by several of the important educational institutions, notably Harvard. But there is but one logical place for the art to be taught—Hollywood. Here there should be a great school, sponsored by the art itself by the presence on its board of some of our biggest screen figures. It should have as its operative head a man well versed in teaching. No one can quarrel with the foregoing premise, and it will be interesting news to Hollywood that such an institution as it needs bids fair to become a reality. The plans are revolving around Paul Gerson, a successful conductor of dramatic schools for the past couple of decades. For a year plans have been fructifying into action. The tentative name under which careful research has been conducted is the National Academy of Motion Picture and Allied Arts, to which I offer as an amendment, the suggestion that the National Academy of Cinema Arts would be less cumbersome. A building has been arranged for and the lot upon which it is to be erected chosen. This is a matter which those high in the industry can not afford to neglect. Mr. Gerson is fitted admirably to

be the pedagogic head of such an institution, but he should not be left to bear the burden of its organization alone. It should be a bigger institution than one man can build. Hollywood as a community should get behind it, for it would attract people here from all over the world. At present it in a measure is teaching those already engaged in making pictures the details of their making, but it is not recruiting untrained brains that can be made of value to the art. The predominance of poor pictures bears testimony to the fact that it is a poor teacher. The fundamentals of the art are not being taught at all. The brain power of the country that pictures so badly need is not being harnessed, and until it is we will not make much progress towards realizing that perfection in screen productions that the dignity of the art demands. The task of teaching the cinema arts is one that belongs peculiarly to Hollywood of all places in the world. The personnel of the industry hitherto has not displayed much community spirit, and here, surely, is an opportunity for it to come into being. The close contact with the industry that such an academy located in Hollywood would have, would be a tremendous factor in its success. We have the brains here and the money necessary to its establishment, and we should not let them lie dormant while other communities and other institutions embark on a project which Hollywood should lead. *The Spectator* believes the matter to be one of tremendous importance to Hollywood and to pictures and will open its columns gladly to those who wish to discuss it.

CAN PICTURES GIVE US THIS?

There's a poignant longing within us,
For something we can not define,
But it subtly exalts us, and bears us
On the wings of emotions sublime.

When it comes with its breathing of fragrance,
Its pulse-stirring essence of life,
O, then, for the nonce we are heroes,
Absolved from all routine and strife.

The things which evoke this strange "something"
Are trifles—a gesture, a kiss—
But they are rooted in primal emotions,
That combine all existence with this.

They are one with the infinite feeling,
That's expressed in the heart of a rose;
The bond of Divinity sealing
The truth that omnipotence knows.

We seek it in books and in pictures,
For art is a thought from above,
That adorns the trite and the common
With the revealing soft vestures of love.

Ah, seldom in life do we savor
The cup of extremest delight,
But its fragrance allures us forever—
Oh, to find it, e'er cometh the Night!

—THE PROOFREADER (George Magoffin)

Applying Pickle Idea to Pictures

UNLESS my poor head for figures betrays me, M.-G.-M., at the last time it issued a catalogue had as many writers on the lot as Heinze has pickles. Some of the brightest literary minds of the country are at the disposal of Metro to write screen stories as fascinating as the printed ones that brought their authors fame. Authors become famous in only one way—by having personalities to which the public responds and the ability to register such personalities by the manner in which they write. Good writing alone does not bring fame. Drieser is a wretched writer, yet he is famous. Every notable writer on the Metro lot has something that the public wants. It wants his flights of fancy, his humor, the drama that is in him or his flair for romance. If this were not the case he would have no fame. Every one of the writers could express himself on the screen as readily as he does on paper. He knows what the public wants and knows that it does not matter how it gets it, whether in a picture or in a book; with the assistance of those who are versed in screen technic he can make himself as delightful on the screen as in print. And although he may know nothing about pictures he is as well equipped as anyone on the lot to judge what should be in them, for he thoroughly understands the people for whom they are made, even though he may never be able to understand the people by whom they are made. All this being the case, Metro, with its fifty-seven varieties of writers, should be able to give the world pictures of extraordinary merit, pictures sparkling with the cleverest of comedy, or brilliantly sophisticated, or throbbing with the intensity of their drama, or gripping because of the strength and color of their romance. But Metro does not give the world such pictures. Most of those that bear its trademark are quite trashy, being in themselves a refutation of any suggestion that any one of the fifty-seven varieties had anything to do with them while they were being made. The reason for this is the fact that Metro is organized as are all the other producing companies in Hollywood. On every lot men who never in their entire careers created one idea that would appeal to an audience, have the supervisory power over the works of others who have become famous because they possess the ability to create ideas that audiences like. They use this power to mold the ideas to conform to a conception of the public taste based on things that have been done in pictures previously and not on things that might be done to give the screen a more widespread appeal. Only a mind capable of creating can handle intelligently the creations of others. We see little that is new on the screen because the minds of most of the supervisors can not grasp new ideas, and their self-complacency will not permit them to take the word of an experienced creator of ideas that his are good. It is a sad spectacle, this one of a brilliant and accomplished author, whose works have pleased millions of readers, having to sit opposite a man neither brilliant nor accomplished and try to sell him an idea that his mind is too dull to grasp and his conceit too great to take for granted. I believe that Mr. Heinze is quite right when he standardizes all his fifty-seven varieties, but the screen is not going to get very far when we apply the pickle idea to pictures.

Too Much Value Attached to Names

SOMETIMES I believe that we would have better pictures if all those of major prominence in them now would go fishing and allow the little-known people an opportunity to use their brains. The other day I sat on the side lines of a set and watched a director friend tell a young man just how to act the scene. The young man draws fifteen hundred dollars each week, the amount being based on the theory that he knows how to act. A man worth that much money should be able to walk on to a set and play a scene without direction. He should be so proficient in his profession that he would know more about it than the director. His importance to the production was such that the director had to cajole him and argue with him in an effort to have the scene done properly. The best that this director could get was a compromise between his knowledge and the actor's lack of it. I imagine that there are one thousand young fellows in Hollywood, any one of whom would have put himself unreservedly in the director's hands and given a much more intelligent interpretation of the scene than did the actor whose weekly check has stupefied him into the arguing habit. There are dozens of minor directors in the business who could make better pictures than the big ones if allowed the same latitude. The same thing is true of the writing end of the pictures. One would think that the combined efforts of Anita Loos, John Emerson, Frances Marion and C. Gardner Sullivan could produce a script that would be the last word in perfection. Four years ago when Joseph Schenck decided to star Constance Talmadge in *Dulcy*, Anita Loos and John Emerson adapted the play to the screen. I read their adaptation and silly is the only word that would describe it. Miss Marion and Sullivan were called in to make it sane and they prepared the shooting script. At that time I was in the Schenck publicity department, headed by Harry Brand, my work being of a quality that caused Harry to sit up nights figuring how to get rid of me without offending his boss, who foisted me on him. Harry finally persuaded Syd Franklin, who was to direct *Dulcy*, that I would be something weird in the way of a script clerk and Syd took me on and I learned about pictures from him. I knew nothing about scripts, but I began to accumulate the impression that there were an awful lot of titles in the Marion-Sullivan script which we, Syd and I, were shooting. I counted them and found there were three hundred and ninety-seven. I hunted up Connie's two previous production records and did some figuring. The result was that I found that if the *Dulcy* script were shot as these experts prepared it, and the titles were spaced according to the average of the two previous pictures, and *Dulcy* released in that form, it would reach the public in twenty reels. Two of the highest paid writers in the business had given their employer a script containing twenty reels of action for a seven reel picture. Surely there are a lot of unknown writers who could do better than that. One fault of this industry of many faults is that it has a too great respect for names. An actor's name has box office value and in paying him a big salary the producer merely is buying something that he can sell at a profit. The names of directors and writers have no box office value, but their work has. If producers would pay them with strict regard

for the quality of their work and none for the prominence of their names we would have a new crop of high salaried persons.

* * *

Directors and Close-up Curse

A DIRECTOR takes up the cudgels for himself and others of his kind. "You assail directors", he writes me, "for their over indulgence in close-ups. I am willing to bet that ninety-nine per cent of the directors agree with the point you are making, but they can not agree that they are to blame. How far do you suppose a director could get if he refused to shoot all the close-ups that stars and producers demand? Of course we don't have to shoot them, but as the alternative is starving to death I imagine we will continue to." This correspondent is quite right. I know most directors are helpless, but as they are in the front ranks of picture people it is natural that they are the ones I aim at when I fire my pop-gun. I know we have many stars with intellects weak enough to lead them to believe that close-ups of them are valuable, and influence strong enough to insist upon having them. The producers who indulge this foolishness are absolute asses. There is only one thing that will do a star or producer any good, and that is a good picture. As too many close-ups harm a picture it follows that they harm also the star and producer. The weirdest idea prevailing in this picture wilderness of weird ideas is that of the producer who feels that he is getting a better run for his money when his highest salaried players are shown in close-ups rather than in medium or long shots. Everything in a picture should be in it solely on account of its story value and not on account of any other consideration. If story value were the only consideration governing the making of every picture, as it should be, close-ups would disappear almost entirely and pictures would be better because of it. It is of more value to any star to be seen always in good pictures than it is to be shown in close-ups. Unfortunately few of our stars have brains enough to grasp this fact. Their overwhelming conceit leads them to believe that the public is sighing for their enlarged faces, reasoning that is harbored only in enlarged heads. Meaningless close-ups that have no story or pictorial value have just about killed Tom Meighan. I see he indignantly is denying that he is retiring from the screen, a matter that the public is taking out of his hands. Those responsible for Colleen Moore's pictures are reducing her box office value by making her poor stories still worse by spattering them with too many close-ups. Nearly all the other stars have the same weakness. Florence Vidor spoils her stories by her conviction that she is the attraction and her insistence in making it dominate her productions. But perhaps it is unfair to single any out when there are so many suffering from the same delusion. But in spite of what my correspondent writes I believe many of our directors have contracted the close-up habit and have fixed it firmly as part of the routine of their shooting. Close-ups of minor characters without importance enough to demand them are numerous. This afternoon I read the script of an important picture now in production. It calls for scores of close-ups for which there is no excuse whatever. There even are close-ups of a parrot and the tail of a snake, either one, I'll grant you, having alluring pos-

sibilities as relief in the endless procession of enlarged faces of the star. When we have more brains in picture-making we will have fewer close-ups. There is no place in the art for both.

* * *

Making the Most of Dramatic Scenes

WHEN we get farther along with our crop of directors who are maturing into people who are getting an insight into the art of making pictures, I hope we will develop a few choice specimens who will have a thorough knowledge of the fundamentals of drama. I never have read anything on the subject, consequently I can not quote authorities to support any argument I may advance, but I believe one can arrive at an understanding of its meaning better by a process of reasoning for himself than by consulting the writings of others on the subject. Human emotions can not be standardized, and all drama is emotional. If a director would give his reasoning faculties full rein in considering his treatment of his big scenes I believe we would have more powerful dramatic scenes on the screen. Let us go into the high places and select a scene as a sample for us to take apart to discover if it contains everything that could have been put into it. *Hotel Imperial* was supervised by Erich Pommer, undoubtedly the possessor of the greatest picture mind in the world, and directed by Mauritz Stiller, a great artist in his line. Such a combination should be able to realize all the dramatic possibilities of any scene. The big moment of this picture is when Pola Negri debases herself to save her sweetheart from a charge of murder. George Seigman had been showering clothes and jewels on her, and her statement that the Austrian officer had been in her room when a murder was committed enrages Seigman. He upbraids Pola for accepting his gifts while being untrue to him. Angrily he tries to tear the rich dress from her. The scene is enacted in a room filled with officers of the army which Seigman commands. I contend that it would have been much more dramatic if it had taken place in a room in which Pola and Seigman were alone together. To start with, I do not believe any general on earth would make such an exhibition of himself in front of his staff, but that is not the important point. No matter how enraged Seigman became we know that he would do nothing violent to Pola, for the other officers would restrain him if he went too far, even if their presence in itself did not restrain him. Therefore as soon as the scene starts we know it has its limitations. If Seigman, cold as ice and hard as steel, had ordered Pola to her room and followed her there, we would not know what to expect. Without witnesses and unrestrained Seigman might go even to the length of killing her. Her peril would be real and without obvious limitations. Being a scene that in real life undoubtedly would be enacted without witnesses, it would have a truer ring if presented that way on the screen. There would be nothing in it to distract the attention of the audience from the two characters. The fewer people there are in a dramatic scene the more dramatic is the scene. Some day I hope to see a director stage an intensely dramatic scene with only one person in it, a character who is having a terrific battle with his own conscience. Next to that in interest is the scene with but two people in it. In the *Hotel Imperial* scene there are

only the two people carrying it, yet there are dozens of other people in it. Messrs. Pommer and Stiller know how to make pictures, but I can not agree with them that their treatment of this scene came anywhere near realizing all the possibilities that were in it.

* * *

**John W. Considine Jr.,
United Artists Studios**

MY DEAR Johnnie,—Back a bit, when this century was quite young, I used to get off a street car in Seattle and often I would see an umbrella and a pair of shoes coming towards me in the rain. The umbrella almost reached the sidewalk and the shoes, of course, did, and somewhere between the two there was a chubby little boy, a most engaging little fellow with pink cheeks, merry eyes and a smile that he was not over-generous with. I would talk to him through the umbrella which so completely covered him, and sometimes he would swing it out of the way and smile up at me. But that was not often. For no reason at all he was hard to see. Finally I adopted a plan to outwit him. I would make him promise one day that I could see him the next, and always he kept his promise. You were the chubby little boy. From the time we lived across from one another on that Seattle street I have watched your career with interest and I am glad that we are again in the same town, you heading an organization that makes pictures and I editing a paper that tells you how to make them. But why do you still carry the obliterating umbrella over your head? That early habit of being hard to see seems to persist still. A few weeks ago I phoned Miss Reber that I wanted to see you. Of course you were in conference. I've been phoning ever since without success, so I will revert to my early method and speak down to you through your umbrella without asking you to let me have a look at you while we converse. In a picture I reviewed a long time ago I noticed a young fellow's work and I went to a lot of trouble to find out who he was. I discovered that his name was Gilbert Roland. I gave him a good notice and you gave him a long-time contract. Lately I have seen a couple of "quickies" in which another young fellow did such good work that I ran him to earth and found out that he is Charles Gerson, son of Paul Gerson. I wanted to tell you about the youth, whom I don't know personally, but who, I am confident, would have a brilliant screen career if he got into good hands. He has the good looks which are a screen asset, but what most impressed me about him is his ability to act. He must have been put through a long course of drilling by his dad, for he certainly knows how to behave before the camera. I do not know if you still are on the lookout for young leading men, but if you are you should send for this young fellow and have a talk with him. I won't bring him to the attention of anyone else until you have had a reasonable time to act. Fix the appointment for the time when Miss Reber is at lunch in order that he can get in to see you. My only interest in

Gerson is the pleasure I derive from giving promising youngsters a leg-up. I haven't missed my guess on any of them yet and if this fellow doesn't turn out to be a crackerjack leading man I'll eat your umbrella. You've had it over your head too long, anyway. — W. B.

* * *

**"The Divine Lady"
Good Screen Material**

SOME of the Armchair Adventures about which Edgcomb Pinchon writes so delightfully take place on the other side of my reading table—a low thing with a trough for books underneath and a place on top for proof-sheets and the big pad upon which I write—that stands between us when he visits me. An armchair has his dent in it and I keep for him a brand of tobacco that I will not smoke myself, nor can I educate him up to the soothing delight of my own mixture. He has a rare taste in pictures, as well as in books, and I see that in his department in this Spectator he acquaints his readers with some of the canvases which hang on my walls, something that had not occurred to me to do, although as I read his columns this week I can see that the fact that a Romney hangs over my fireplace, flanked on one side by what I think is one of the most exquisite landscapes that Richard Wilson ever painted, and on the other by one of William Barraud's famous English hunting scenes, is a matter of interest to those who love Old Masters. However, I would make no mention of them now if Pinchon had not left me an opening in his reference to the Romney. He says it is one of the most famous works of that famous master, and there he is wrong. I'll grant that it is one of Romney's greatest, but part of its charm to me is the fact that it is not famous. It has a romance of its own which has kept it out of exhibitions. Of the thirty or so portraits of Lady Hamilton which Romney painted, the one that hangs over my fireplace is the only one showing his "divine lady" in an unconventional pose. There is little doubt, according to all authorities, that the painter was infatuated with the woman whose charms almost led to the undoing of Lord Nelson, and this painting is his own intimate study of her, an artistic tribute to the love he bore her, painted for himself and retained by him until he died. Then it went into a private collection, where it reposed for a century and a half, its existence known only to a few, and no fame came to it. I have seen Romneys in London, Paris and New York, but I have seen none other that I like as I do the one that looks down upon me now as I write. I have not seen the two that Henry Huntington has brought to Pasadena and for which he paid a quarter of a million dollars, but I have an idea that I would not be willing to make a trade of mine for one of his. Pinchon reviews *The Divine Lady* in this issue. It is a book that should be brought to the screen. A powerful romance could be written around the Emma Hart who became Lady Hamilton and whom crowned heads honored in spite of the life she led. When the choice of an actress to play the leading role is being determined the interested director may make a pilgrimage to my fireplace and gaze upon the living image of the original. If he can find in the portrait the slightest resemblance to any woman now on the screen he will make a discovery that has eluded me. We have so many beautiful women in Hollywood that one would think that any famous beauty of

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other place or other time must look at least a little like one of ours, but in my *Lady Hamilton* I can see no single feature that recalls one that I have seen on the screen. Romney was adept at preserving the likeness while enhancing the beauty of his subjects. He has made *Lady Hamilton* gorgeously beautiful without producing a model that matches any that the screen displays.

* * *

Norma Talmadge In Superb Picture

ADD one to my list of the ten best pictures of 1927. The first I put on it was *Flesh and the Devil*, notable for the fine direction of Clarence Brown. Then I added *Resurrection*, largely on account of the superb performance of Dolores del Rio. Now comes *Camille*, notable for three things, and it is such a perfect production that it is impossible to say which of the three makes the greatest contribution to it. Fred de Gresac wrote a highly meritorious screen version of the Dumas book, Fred Niblo gave it a quality of direction that he himself never achieved before, and Norma Talmadge contributes the greatest performance she ever has given to the screen. These three perfections merge into one perfect whole. It is an interesting fact that all three of the pictures which I like so well have the so-called "unhappy" ending, although in each of them the ending is logical. The De Gresac treatment of the *Camille* story is intelligent and in some respects novel. At the outset it is shown that the heroine is dead and her lover heartbroken. Thus you know at the start, before you have become interested in the leading characters, that their love affair has had a tragic ending. The adapter was presented with the difficulty of making *Camille* the mistress of a man of wealth without depriving her of the sympathy of the audience. She is shown as having contact with the world of wealth and fashion through the instrument of her position in a modiste establishment. This makes logical her easy manner when she becomes wealthy and fashionable. Next she is shown being subjected to the utmost cruelty in a squalid and forbidding home, in front of which the rich man waits with his carriage and pair. Circumstances forced her into his arms. The characterization that Norma Talmadge gives *Camille* is similar to that which will have to be given *Lady Hamilton* if *The Divine Lady* be brought to the screen. *Lady Hamilton* herself tells us what her own views are. "You have known me in poverty and prosperity," she writes to the artist, George Romney, from Caserta in Italy, "and I had no occasion to have lived for years in poverty and distress if I had not felt something of virtue in my mind. Oh, my dear friend, for a time I own through distress virtue was vanquished. But my sense of virtue was not overcome." The De Gresac adaptation keeps the sense of virtue alive throughout the characterization. Another sensible departure is the modernizing of the story. *Camille* is not a story of a period. It belongs to to-day as well as to yesterday. When it first appeared in book form it was strictly up-to-date. To be up-to-date on the screen is logical. Donald hit it off in one of his reviews in which he said that he did not like costumes which were just old enough to be funny and not old enough to be romantic. *Camille* is modern in every respect, therefore the impression is made that it deals with the affairs of real people. The fact that its locale is Paris is not

stressed particularly. The story itself is what is put forward, not the time nor the place. And it is a great love story, beautifully written with a single thought for telling the story and none for dragging in anything that does not belong.

* * *

Niblo's Direction Is a Great Achievement

THE opening sequence of *Camille* made me a little dubious. I thought Fred Niblo had started off at a pace that he could not continue. I did not think it was probable that I was going to see a picture that would live up to the promise of such early scenes. But my fears proved groundless. The production is absolutely even throughout. It flows along smoothly, pleasing to both the eye and the mind. It takes itself too seriously to pause for the introduction of anything foreign to it. Only as a *Spectator* space-filler does it fall down. When I say that Fred Niblo's direction is intelligent and without a flaw I have exhausted a subject which in most productions is good for one of my longest paragraphs. When *Camille* is released I think it will be agreed generally that it is the best thing that Fred has given us, which gives it a high place among motion pictures. Not even in *Smilin' Through* did Norma give such a capable performance as she does in *Camille*. The script must not be given all the credit for the fact that *Camille* holds the sympathy of the audience throughout. Norma must have felt a deep pity for Dumas' character and she plays her with understanding and feeling that reach out from the screen. There is not a too great bid for sympathy, nor a too sentimental appeal for tears. Norma's *Camille* is a woman just too weak to resist wealth and luxury as alternatives to poverty and suffering, but strong enough in the end to sacrifice everything to the great love she has for Armand. Her performance is shaded admirably and in every phase of it she reflects a matured art that adds to her standing as a screen actress. Armand is played by Gilbert Roland, a young man making his first bid for serious recognition. John W. Considine Jr. signed him on a long-term contract after reading my praise of his performance in *The Plastic Age*, and in *Camille* the young fellow justifies the judgement of both of us. He is equal to the demands of every scene and when the picture is released he will be rated as a leading man who gives promise of speedily ranking with Jack Gilbert and Ronald Colman. He has a more masculine appeal than Gilbert and a sincerity as great as Colman's. His mechanics need perfecting, but that is something that comes naturally with experience. Gilbert Roland has arrived. A notable feature of the picture is the slight stress that is laid on the fact that *Camille* was a consumptive. Fred Niblo's handling of her death is a notable piece of direction, sympathetic, tender and beautiful. At the end we see only the patient's hand holding a camellia, first upright and then drooping slowly until it lies still among the lace of the bed covering. No more exquisite death-bed scene ever was presented on the screen. I am sorry that a love scene between *Camille* and Armand, and later a scene in which Armand denounces *Camille*, were shown in close-ups. They are the only flaws in an otherwise perfect picture, but fortunately are not serious enough to detract greatly from the manifold excellencies of the production, although not excusable on that account.

Both are scenes that should have been presented in double close-ups or medium shots. W. Cameron Menzies has given the picture a notably artistic production and the camera work of Oliver Marsh is an outstanding example of effective photography. The picture was made by the United Artists organization for First National release, the last of Norma's productions for such release. John W. Considine Jr. supervised the picture for Joseph M. Schenck, and to him must go a great deal of credit for the great results accomplished.

"Rookies" Is Quite an Entertaining Comedy

WHEN I learned that M.-G.-M. had decided to feature George K. Arthur and Karl Dane in comedies I was a little dubious about the success of the venture. I was satisfied that in Arthur it had one of the best comedians on the screen, but of Dane I had my doubts. But after seeing the first picture in which the team appears I am willing to concede cheerfully that Harry Rapf—I think it is he who supervises this unit—knew a devil of a lot more about it than I did. It's a great team and Dane is very much a part of it. The picture is called *Rookies* and its setting is a Citizens' Military Training Camp. It succeeds in being funny without making the service ridiculous as *Behind the Front* makes the army, or vulgar, as *What Price Glory?* makes the marines. Byron Morgan in his story and Sam Wood with his direction make the central characters normal human beings, consequently the things that happen to them are funnier than they would be if Arthur and Dane had been characterized as hopeless asses, as Beery and Hatton were presented in the pictures in which they teamed. *Rookies* is just a series of incidents, most of them exceedingly funny and the last one most thrilling. Interspersed is some vulgarity that M.-G.-M. should be ashamed to sponsor. The studio people will defend the vulgarity on the ground that preview audiences laughed at it. Any lapse from good taste on the screen is greeted with laughter, which in no way excuses it. If an excuse for vulgarity be the laughter it causes, a producer should be still more vulgar and create still more laughter. One sequence in *Rookies* falls down, and it is interesting to speculate on the reason for it. George Arthur is shown garnering a large collection of ants. We know he is going to use them to square accounts with Dane. A review takes place and we see ants crawling on Dane's neck. It is not funny because we do not know how Arthur managed it. The only interesting feature of comedy of this sort is how it is done. If Arthur had been shown sprinkling the ants on Dane's clothes, followed by Dane rushing in to dress hurriedly for the parade, the sequence would have been funny because the audience would anticipate a laugh. It would have waited for Dane's first reaction to the presence of the crawling creatures. But, on the whole, the picture is an excellent piece of screen entertainment. I base this opinion more on the uproarious laughter with which a large preview audience greeted it than upon my personal reaction to it. Its humor is obvious, which is not the kind of humor I like best in pictures, but I was the only member of my own family who did not vote it one of the funniest things ever presented on the screen, and if M.-G.-M. has pleased a mother, two daughters and a son, it need not worry

much about me. Metro should restrain any impulse that may develop to present Arthur and Dane in wildly ridiculous farces. No producer will have permanent success in stretching two-reelers into seven-reelers. These two Metro comedians can attain great popularity if presented in a series of stories that are knit together into sensible narratives and in characterizations that do not make idiots of them.

* * *

Great Photography Features "The Brute"

THE photography is a big feature of *The Brute*, Monte Blue's latest starring vehicle, soon to be released by Warners. The picture opens in *Death Valley* and Conrad Wells' camera has caught some of the most exquisite scenes of the wastes of sand that ever have been presented to the world. Their beauty is startling. They have a silvered effect that I never before have seen on the screen. One, in particular, showing Monte standing beside his horse, is a triumph of composition and superb photography. The desert scenes alone would give any picture the dignity of high art and no picture containing them could be altogether a failure. In my review of *The Country Beyond* I commented on the masterly manner in which Abe Freid caught the majestic beauty of the Canadian Rockies. He apparently has reached the decision that Abe Freid is not a name that reflects his wizardry with the camera and has changed it to Conrad Wells, which was his right and which he has the talent to make as famous as a cameraman can become. The photography in *Barbara Worth* has been praised, but it is not comparable with that in *The Brute*. In Wells, Irving Cummings has an artist he should cling to. Some of the credit for the artistic shots in both *The Country Beyond* and *The Brute* belongs, of course, to Cummings, the director who was wise enough to include them in the pictures. All Wells' art in the latest picture is not confined to the desert. A love scene between Blue and Leila Hyams has a setting of surpassing beauty, some of the effect of which is lost by Cumming's conventional treatment of the scene. After planting it he moves the camera up to show the love scene in medium shots and close-ups, thereby losing all the pictorial value of the setting. The scene would have been much more effective if it had been shown in a long shot without a camera change. With this single exception Cumming's direction is very fine. In fact, *The Brute* is one of the most capably directed pictures any American director has given us for a long time. There is everything in it, tender love scenes, fights, a gushing oil well, a dance hall, crowded streets and empty desert, which call for a wide range of directorial application, but, whatever the scene, Cummings handles it with regard for the individual treatment it should receive. He makes a really notable picture of *The Brute*. I saw it in preview and my estimate of it is based on the presumption that it will receive the revision it so obviously needed. There is one scene, showing an Indian trading his squaw, children and a hearse for a Ford, that has as much to do with the picture as the Declaration of Independent has, and I presume it will be one of the things eliminated. The story of *The Brute* is too engrossing to excuse the introduction of extraneous shots. The Indians have nothing to do with the story and the audience is not interested in them, con-

sequently anything they do is a matter of no importance. Attempts to introduce vaudeville turns in motion pictures never will be successful. A story that can not be told right through from beginning to end without pauses for comedy turns by people who have no part in it is a story that should not be made into a picture.

* * *

Monte Blue Gives a Good Performance

MONTE Blue is one of our most versatile screen actors and one of our best. From the joyous comedian in *So This Is Paris!* to the revenge-seeking mule driver in *The Brute*—from a deliciously funny Parisian doctor to a plainsman with a murderous impulse—he reveals an extraordinary range of screen acting and I am not quite sure that there is anyone else on the screen who could display a skill so inclusive. In *The Brute* he plays a serious part not seriously enough to make it drab. It is a role that builds up and when it reaches its high point Blue makes the most of it. The most dramatic moment is when he is walking along a crowded street at night. Of necessity it is shown in a long shot, the camera traveling with Blue as he plods relentlessly towards the villain, the coiled whip in his hand allowing us to anticipate what is going to happen when the two meet. It is a scene which proves in a striking manner the strength of my contention that as much drama can be shown in a long shot as in a close-up. Here we have a scene that can be handled only in a long shot and it is the most dramatic scene in a picture which contains a great deal of drama. We do not even see Monte's face. All we see is his figure weaving in and out among the crowds on the sidewalk, and the scene is dramatic because we know what it means. After I reviewed *Summer Bachelors* I phoned the Warner studio and asked the name of the girl who played opposite Matt Moore. I was informed that it was Leila Hyams. In my review I paid a high tribute to her performance, saying that I never had seen anyone more natural when in front of the camera. I was told it was her first picture, so *The Brute* must be her second. It is going some to become Monte Blue's leading woman with only one previous picture to your credit. Miss Hyams need have no worry about her screen career. Her performance in *The Brute* gives her a place in the front rank of leading women. It is so good that I am grateful to her for so soon demonstrating my ability as a good picker. Her part is one of the so-called colorless kind, an adjectival classification that can be given a performance, but never a role. Personality always will register. Leila Hyams has it, and her two performances that I have seen satisfy me that she has a brilliant career on the screen. If she can do so well, first with no previous screen experience, and next with experience gained in only one picture, it is reasonable to expect something really great from her when she has accumulated the experience that a dozen pictures will give her. She exactly fitted every scene in *The Brute* in which she was a central character. It was a relief to see real tears welling into her eyes in the scenes that called for them. One tires of glycerine so easily. Clyde Cook, Paul Nicholson and Carroll Nye contribute excellent performances to *The Brute*. In a picture so extraordinarily rich in production value we might excuse a shortage of real acting,

but *The Brute* is as generous in one way as the other. There are five outstanding parts and each of them is portrayed in a manner that reflects the highest credit on whoever is responsible for the casting. Cook is a delightful comedian, Nicholson a thoroughly detestable villain, and Nye an appealing juvenile. Warner Brothers have reason to be satisfied with this picture, and I predict that it will do a lot of good for everyone in the cast. I have appropriated for myself the role of Miss Hyams' discoverer and in that capacity I feel gratified that her second picture is going to be a success that will do credit to all those connected with it.

* * *

"Let It Rain" Quite All Right

THE only Douglas McLean picture I have seen since *The Spectator* came into being is *Let It Rain*. He doesn't seem to make many. I always like him on the screen, for his productions are clean and in the best of taste. I do not know him personally, but have enjoyed the experience of being fearfully high-hatted by him at the Ambassador one night. I wanted to make a suggestion to him, and to avoid another chill I will draw my chair closer to the fire, and make it now. Scotland is a rather romantic country and the Scottish character an interesting one. The name, Douglas McLean, is as Scotch as oatmeal porridge. Harry Lauder made millions with his Scotch characterizations, proving that they have box office value. The suggestion I was going to make to McLean was that he should capitalize his name and give us at least four all-Scotch pictures, even if he had to go to Scotland for his exteriors. We do not see enough real foreign backgrounds in our pictures, nor enough characterizations of other people. McLean may not look much like our conception of the typical Scotchman, but his name proves that he must be one, therefore it follows that he must look like one. I found *Let It Rain* quite an entertaining picture. I enjoyed it because it had nothing in it to offend me. I was impressed particularly by its freedom from close-ups. Most of the scenes take place on a battleship and all were shot in a manner that gave the audience the benefit of the interesting backgrounds. Apparently Douglas is not one of those stars who believe that their enlarged likenesses are all that the public wants. *Let It Rain* gives spoken titles to people in long shots, quite a sensible thing. At no time was there any confusion as to who was speaking. The picture on the whole has nothing dramatic in it and nothing to cause uproarious laughter, but it is entertaining because of its healthy atmosphere and because McLean and Shirley Mason give excellent performances. I liked particularly the manner in which the love story was developed. The two appear in medium shots and hold long conversations, but no spoken titles are given. It is a very sensible treatment of such scenes. The audience knows that the young people are saying those unimportant things of vast importance to lovers, silly nothings upon which love is built. The absence of spoken titles left the words to the imagination of the audience, enabling even a confirmed old bachelor to construe the conversations to fit the amorous adventures he surely must have had. One sequence in the picture falls down. It takes place in the interior of a mail car, which McLean saves from robbery by bandits. As

directed it is not convincing and lacks all the melodrama it might have had. It could have been thrilling or funny, but is neither. One bandit with a gun in his hand allows the unarmed McLean the freedom of the car. He does no shooting until McLean has him tied in a mail sack. Why he did not use his gun when he was more sure of his aim I do not know. Let It Rain treats the naval and marine services with dignity and all the characters in it are real, features for which the picture is to be commended. I forgive McLean for his high-hatting and thank him for the pleasant hour he gave me.

* * *

This One Killed By Poor Direction

THE Perfect Sap had everything in it to make it a good picture of its sort. It is a crook story set in sophisticated circles, allowing for an elaborate production and considerable action. Ben Lyon, Pauline Stark, Virginia Lee Corbin, Sam Hardy and Brand Whitlock have enough talent to provide satisfactory performances. The story has a definite plot and is interesting. But the picture as a whole is without much merit. It is worth while to inquire into the reason. I have had quite a lot to say of late about the use of close-ups. I maintain that they are used to an extent that is detrimental to pictures. I believe that *The Perfect Sap* is one picture that is ruined by too many of them. I arrive at this conclusion both directly and by process of elimination, for I can find no other reason for its lack of appeal. There is one entire sequence played entirely in close-ups. It is an interior scene, played in a room, but the room is not established. There are four characters in it, but at no time is their relation to one another shown. It is just a succession of faces. Not one of the close-ups is justifiable, even if the room had been planted at the outset to show where the scene was being enacted. The average audience viewing this picture and finding it dull, probably would not analyze it to discover the reason, but I am satisfied that the dullness can be attributed to such scenes as this one which could not interest an audience that did not know where it was taking place. All through the picture the same weakness is apparent, making inevitable the conclusion that *The Perfect Sap* is a poor picture because it received most unintelligent direction. Howard Higgin directed it under the supervision of Ray Rockett. Over-indulgence in close-ups seems to run in the Rockett family, for every picture supervised by brother Al has the same fault. It would be interesting to know who it is in the First National organization who thinks motion pictures should consist almost entirely of portraits. The direction throughout is very poor. Characters walk into scenes and turn to face the camera before speaking, movie stuff of the most obvious sort. In one scene the guests at a party are excited over a jewel robbery and flock around Sam Hardy, who plays a detective. It is his scene, consequently there is a wide lane through the crowd to enable the camera to catch him. It is a perfect example of stupid grouping. Whoever heard of an excited crowd splitting into two parts when its attention was focused upon one spot and when there was no reason for the wide line through its middle? Sam Hardy did not run quite true to form as a detective. He kept his hat on in the house all right, but he continually took his cigar out of

his mouth. Apparently Higgin does not know that detectives never remove their cigars from between their lips. That's how we know they are detectives, that and keeping their hats on in drawing-rooms. Ben Lyon gives a capable performance in this picture. Hitherto he has not been one of the screen actors about whom I am wildly enthusiastic, but I could find no fault with him this time. Brand Whitlock always impresses me with the sincerity of his work. In *The Perfect Sap* he gives a good performance of a gentleman crook. To sum up—The picture could have been an engrossing one filled with good acting if the direction had revealed the slightest idea that the man responsible for it knew what it was all about.

* * *

"Increasing Purpose" Is Highly Creditable

ONE *Increasing Purpose* is another evidence of William Fox's determination to produce pictures with an intellectual appeal, irrespective of their conformity to established box office standards. The unforgettable *If Winter Comes* was the first production of the kind that I can remember Fox making. The latest attempt is as noteworthy as an attempt, but as a motion picture it does not rate as high as the other because it is not such good screen material. Nor does it have one central figure that provides an opportunity for a duplication of the success Percy Marmont achieved in his magnificent characterization in *If Winter Comes*. Edmund Lowe is very good in *One Increasing Purpose*, but it is a straight part that makes no great demands on an actor. But the picture is a highly meritorious one that reflects the greatest credit on the Fox organization. It is an honestly made picture. The spirit of the book is transferred to the screen acceptably and Harry Beaumont's direction reveals a thorough understanding of what was in Hutchinson's mind when he wrote it. The direction is sympathetic and intelligent, possessing an intellectuality comparable with that of the novel. Fox was not afraid to spend his money. He sent a company to England and it brought back many atmospheric shots which had both story and educational value. Bradley King's adaptation made wise use of these shots. He, too, caught the spirit of the book and turned out a script that is greatly to his credit as a fine piece of screen writing. When it came to casting the parts Fox gave Beaumont a collection of artists that any director should be proud to work with—Lowe, Huntly Gordon, Nickolas Soussanin, Holmes Herbert, George Irving, Lawford Davidson, Lila Lee, May Allison, Jane Novak and Emily Fitzroy. A good story, intelligent direction and a cast like this could result only in a first class picture, although I can see that it might not be one that would have a wide popular appeal. Readers of the book no doubt will be disappointed with it unless they sympathize with Fox's good intention in trying to compress an extended piece of literature within the limits of screen possibilities. They scarcely will excuse the failure to include in the picture one of the most interesting characters in the book, B. C. D., the novelist and long-haired genius, whose mode of life was the inspiration for *Sim*, the part played by Lowe, to embark on his evangelistic adventure. But I believe the number of people who read a book is so very small as compared with those who see a picture made from it that it can not make much

difference in the success or failure of a picture whether it sticks to the original story or wanders away from it. There are some excellent performances in *One Increasing Purpose*. Holmes Herbert is compelling in a "mad scene" that would tax the powers of any actor. He is equal to its demands as he is to all other exactions of his part. Soussanin's performance is a remarkable one. I have seen him previously only in *Hotel Imperial* and know nothing of his background, but am convinced that in him the screen has a really great heavy. Lila Lee always is good. She is one of our most earnest young actresses and in this Fox picture does very well. And I don't think I ever saw Huntly Gordon give a more intelligent interpretation of a part than he does in *One Increasing Purpose*.

* * *

"Yankee Clipper" Is Without Merit

ABOUT all the De Mille studio accomplished when it made *The Yankee Clipper* was the spoiling for picture purposes of an epoch in American history out of which a screen masterpiece could have been made. A picture doing it justice can not now be made for a long time, as no matter how worthy such a picture might be, it would not be successful if it rode too closely on the heels of this failure. De Mille has repeated with this bit of American history what Paramount did with the story of the U. S. S. Constitution, made a poor picture out of a good subject and in so doing spoiled the good subject for anyone else. But *Old Ironsides*, bad as it is, is better than *The Yankee Clipper*. The former is not so blatantly a movie. It falls down because it has no story, but the shots in it are handled satisfactorily. In *The Clipper* there is perhaps even more of a story, at least one that can be treated more intimately, for it deals with but two ships, while *Old Ironsides* includes the navies of different nations; but as a picture it suffers because the camera plays the leading part. In every scene all the characters face the camera. In the whole picture there is not a single instance of correct grouping. In the love scenes between Elinor Fair and William Boyd they stand shoulder to shoulder facing the camera and they speak their titles at the camera. When Junior Coghlan, the only member of the cast who does any acting, becomes the center of interest in one scene, sailors run to him, turn to face the camera and take up their positions behind him and in line with him. The president of the United States enters his cabinet room and instead of his chair being pulled up to the table to enable him to look down it, as all presiding officers do, the chair is pulled back in order that the position of the president would have him facing the camera, even though it made it necessary for him to toss his words over his shoulder at those with whom he was conversing. Very few of our directors seem to have made a study of grouping. I would like to show some of them two of Anton Von Werner's steel engravings which hang on my walls. In one, the Berlin congress of 1878, there are twenty-eight important people—Bismarck, Von Bulow, Lord Russell, Lord Salisbury, Disraeli, and others—and the engraving contains an excellent portrait of each. It is full of action, there being nothing stilted about it; the grouping being entirely natural although each of the twenty-eight men "faces the camera." The other, the capitulation of Sedan, contains sixteen portraits and has

even more action in it. Again the sixteen "face the camera" without a suggestion that they have been posed with the sole purpose of registering their faces. Bismarck, Moltke and other great men interested in the siege and defense of Sedan fairly live in this superb engraving. I don't suppose Von Werner ever earned as much in six months as most of our directors earn in one, but he certainly possessed an ability that nearly all directors lack. A director would get better results if he forgot all about the camera when he was composing a scene. His sole thought should be for natural grouping, leaving it up to the cameraman to shoot the scene as best he could. This method would give us better pictures, not such a stilted and unconvincing one as *The Yankee Clipper*.

* * *

Very Weak Story Is Handled Poorly

BUT it is not only in the grouping that *The Clipper* falls down. I do not understand how De Mille himself, Bill Sistrom and the others responsible for the studio's output, could view this picture in the projection room and content themselves with the thought that it was worthy to go forth under the De Mille trademark. Until the story reaches China it drags wearily. I yawn again as I recall it. It betrays its own weakness by its efforts to strengthen itself by taking in its embrace bits of lamentable comedy that do not advance the story. It is obvious that anything that does not advance a story must retard it, and a good picture can not be made out of a story that stutters. The only interesting feature of the production is the acting of Junior Coghlan, and his character is a dragged-in one. Walter Long does a savage bit, one of the half dozen thoughts which the picture starts, but never finishes. In his most fiendish way he tells Miss Fair that he can rescue her from Boyd; she tells John Miljan about it, and that is all there is to it. It doesn't come off. It is beyond my comprehension how a modern studio can turn out a story so absurdly constructed. But the most glaring weakness of this weak picture is its failure to realize the possibilities of its greatest feature, the race from an Oriental port to Boston Harbor of the English and American ships. There was nothing exciting at the start of the race, during it or at the finish. Not one shot while the race was on suggested speed, consequently it did not build up to give the finish any thrill. There was no excuse for the failure of the picture to make the most of the race. There was a fine chance at the beginning for some beautiful and thrilling shots. The moment when a yacht or a full-rigged ship comes into the wind, heels over and begins to plow up spray always makes a beautiful picture. If the race had opened with scenes of great activity on board both boats, to establish the excitement that prevailed and which the audience would share; followed by a long-shot showing the ships coming into the wind, their sails bellying; the two alongside as they gathered speed; close-ups of the bows, at first gently stirring the water, then filling the screen with the furrow they were cutting—if this treatment had been accorded the beginning of the race it would have created in the audience enough excitement to have lasted until the end. As presented, however, its slow and uninteresting opening made the progress of the race a matter of little interest. For the finish there should have

been a camera in an airplane, or on a boat ahead of the racers, showing the on-coming clippers growing larger, side by side in the same shot, until they completely filled the screen. The inefficiency that characterized the whole production reached the peak of its effectiveness in the race sequence. Perhaps I should exclude John Miljan from my sweeping denunciation of the acting. His part was utterly inconsistent and as bad as everything else in the picture, but his interpretation of that kind of character was a really good piece of work. Boyd poses throughout the picture, grins sometimes, frowns occasionally, but never acts, which I attribute to Rupert Julian's direction. Nothing more inadequate than Miss Fair's performance could be imagined.

* * *

Some Mistakes, Mostly Nautical

THE presence in *The Yankee Clipper* of characters representing President Zachary Taylor and Queen Victoria gave the picture historical verisimilitude that the story did not live up to. Taylor's appearance definitely fixes the period of the story which was at least two years before the "Lord of the Isles", the British ship which figures in it, was built. Incidentally, the "Lord of the Isles" was an iron ship, while that in the picture is a wooden one. It also is worthy of passing note that the marine history of the United States does not record the existence of a vessel called "The Yankee Clipper". The chief characteristic of the clippers that gave American shipping such prestige was the whiteness of their sails. The shining white cotton duck sails were famous. In the picture the American ship had sails of old, patched and stained canvas. The anchors shown were of a type not made until a few decades after the period of the picture. I do not understand what a China Sea typhoon was doing off the shores of South America. It would seem that the quite well known pampero, a meteorological disturbance peculiar to the region so carefully indicated, would have been quite as satisfying, particularly as it is characterized by a suddenness and degree of violence sufficiently dramatic for motion picture purposes. But despite its customary rapid approach it is inconceivable that any competent ship master, however engrossed by the blandishments of an attractive though disdainful lady, should have failed to take ample warning from the barometric and numerous other indications of an impending storm available to him. To have the lookout sight it as he would a spouting whale, would be all right in a nautical farce, but scarcely fits in a picture that takes itself seriously. The storm scenes were handled very well, particularly the boarding seas, but there was a sad lack of seamanship displayed in maneuvering the ships in the miniatures. It does not take much of a sailor to know that the way the American boat was handled on her arrival in Foochow Harbor was quite impossible. Even an amateur yachtsman knows that a ship's way must be checked before the anchor is dropped. In the picture the clipper actually bears off without touching a brace as the anchor is let go. This handling would have accelerated the ship's speed through the water to an extent that would have caused the chain to snap when the anchor took hold. It is an unwritten law of the sea that the national colors must be hoisted and lowered flying. In the picture they



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were broken out in a close-up. Historically the story is full of holes. At a time when the American clippers were the speediest vessels afloat, England boasting nothing that could compare with them in that respect, Lord Huntington in the picture tells Queen Victoria that the American ships were lacking in speed. That title would have been all right if it had been followed by a shot of the queen coyly slapping the lord with her fan and exclaiming, "Oh, you go on!" I have gone into all these details, omitting the mention of many others, both nautical and historical, that could be included, to show the inefficient manner in which the De Mille production force handled this picture. If it had recognized its own inability to do the subject justice it might have left this picturesque period in American history to more competent producers who could have given us a great picture. It might have practiced a little longer on Gertie's garter before it tackled anything as important as this glorious epoch in the annals of American shipping.

* * *

"There You Are" Pleasing Comedy

PERHAPS the chief feature of *There You Are* is the capable manner in which Ed Sedgwick directed it. But F. Hugh Herbert wrote a clever screen version of his novel. And Conrad Nagel and Edith Roberts acted their parts splendidly. Likewise Ralph Spence wrote some pretty good titles. The whole thing is clever and entertaining. I am convinced that this is due largely to the fact that it is almost entirely free from close-ups. The story is told mainly in deep medium shots, and not a little of it in long shots. In reviewing several First National pictures of late I stated that the fact that they were little better than a succession of close-ups practically ruined them, although fairly good pictures might have been made from the stories if they had been directed properly. *There You Are* rather supports my argument. As Sedgwick directed it the audience must feel that the whole story, so to speak, is before it at all times. M.-G.-M. gave it one of its thoroughly satisfactory productions and we never are allowed to lose sight of the pictorial effectiveness of the settings. At all times the picture is satisfying to the eye; we do not lose sight of the relation of the characters to one another, and there is none of that ceaseless jumping from one close-up to another that makes so many pictures tiresome to look at. As a light comedy the story is clever. We allow comedies some latitude, so may excuse this one for side-stepping the fact that a simple explanation by Nagel would have ended the baby episode before it got really started. I believe, though, that even in rollicking comedies scenes can be made consistent and can gain comedy value thereby. For instance, Edith Roberts is locked in a closet in an office for three hours. At the end of that time she is shown standing by the door, asleep, in order that she will fall into Nagel's arms when he opens the door. No one can stand upright without supports and go to sleep. Her natural position would have been lying on the floor and it would have been funnier for Nagel to have found her in that position as he could have imagined that she was dead and built up comedy on such an idea. In another scene Nagel puts a telegram telling of his impending elopement with George Fawcett's daughter among some papers which he hands to Fawcett. He is afraid to

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retrieve it, although it would have been a simple thing for him to do. There would have been more comedy, and more reason, in it if he had no idea what had happened to the telegram and had made a frantic effort to find it. Nagel acts his part most capably and he would build a great reputation for himself as a comedian if Metro would put him in more stories as clever as this one. He is an excellent actor when he has a part that gives him an opportunity. Miss Roberts likewise gives a capital performance. She has a fine sense of comedy and a great deal of the success of the picture is due to her good work. Eddie Gribbon never fails to be funny. The screen has few better comedians. George Fawcett, sterling actor, is cast happily in this picture. The fellow who plays the effeminate hotel clerk, whoever he is, is a good bet that producers are overlooking. He is very funny and was responsible for many laughs. *There You Are* demonstrates that you have to have a well-knit story to make a comedy successful and that such story must be told by human beings, not by the bunch of half-wits as most of the people in comedies are characterized.

* * *

In the last *Spectator* I made reference to Clyde Cook's great ability as an actor. Since writing that paragraph I have seen him in *The Brute*. I am more than ever convinced that he has ability and a screen personality that should place him among the half dozen most popular picture artists. His sense of comedy is delicious, but he is more than a comedian. He has a human appeal comparable with Chaplin's and more marked than Langdon's, and no other comedians approach these three in that respect. There is tragedy in his eyes when he sees fit to put it there, a pathetic appeal, a witsfulness that even Chaplin can not attain. His mental equipment, therefore, is as great as that of any other actor appearing on the screen, but in addition to it he has a physical ability that none other possesses. He has extraordinary skill as a tumbler and contortionist and a pair of legs even funnier than Leon Errol's. If some wise producer would get hold of Clyde Cook and put him in the right stories he would be a sensation. There is nothing personal in my praise of him. I never have seen him off the screen and his name even is not on *The Spectator's* subscription list, two conditions that I hope will be remedied before long.

* * *

The *Spectator* always would like to give credit where it is due, but it can not remedy the screen's deficiencies in that respect. An issue or so ago I praised the titles written for some picture by George Marion and received an emphatic telegram from Gene Towne saying that he had written them. As the screen gave credit to Marion all I could do was to accept it as my authority, which always is my rule. The whole system of screen credit is about as rotten as everything else connected with production. Through no volition of my own I have become a near approach to a father confessor for many picture people and am the recipient of much information which is not part of *The Spectator's* policy to print. I know of scores of instances where the work of unknown people with brains has been credited on the screen to famous people with precious little, but I can not do battle for the submerged geniuses. Until motion pictures become honest the place to fight for credit is in the studios, not in *The Spectator*.

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AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — *The Spectator's 16-Year-Old Critic*

(There has been a very sick young man in *The Spectator* household. His department is short this issue, for he took to his bed after writing six paragraphs, ten being the mark he usually aims at. The last three were written when he had high fever and considerable pain. But the purpose of this note is to explain that there will be nothing from him in the next issue, his first absence from our pages since *The Spectator* started. Journalistic instinct rather than paternal pride, makes me believe his department is acceptable to *Spectator* readers, but I would like to hear from them regarding it. Some of the letters, I hope, will cheer, and hasten, his convalescence.—W. B.)

HOTEL IMPERIAL is the second picture of Pola Negri's which I enjoyed. The other one was *Barbed Wire*, and they were both done under the supervision of Erich Pommer. With two such good pictures as *Barbed Wire* and *Hotel Imperial* behind her, Pola Negri has a good start back to good pictures. Whether she will keep up her start and continue to make good pictures, or whether she will slump again, remains to be seen. Her performance in *Hotel Imperial* was as fine as hers usually are, but George Seigman stole the picture. His portrayal was one of the best balanced I ever have seen on the screen; because just when he was most villainous, he would get an opportunity to show what a fine soldier he was. His work would have featured any picture. James Hall's performance was somewhat overshadowed by the star's and the heavy's, but was quite capable. They were such a heterogeneous collection that the few that were really good got lost in the shuffle. There was even an attempt to put some wise-cracking titles in. That was the last straw. Much of *Hotel Imperial's* merit lay in the fine characterizations. Every one was done excellently in a different way.

M. G. M. is the first of the producing units to wake up to the wonderful picture possibilities in the Citizens' Military Training Camp. From that start they have made one of the funniest pictures I have seen for months. The picture was no work of art; there was no story to speak of; but it was funny just the same. The titles of Joe Farnham, of course, were about the biggest feature of the picture; but there was a great deal of funny action, too. Before I go any farther, it might be a good idea to say that the picture was *Rookies*, featuring George K.

Arthur and Karl Dane. To anyone who has ever been a rookie, or ever seen a rookie outfit perform for the first time with rifles, the picture was great. George Arthur made a wonderful rookie, just as Dane made a good veteran. The scenes during the drill were the funniest, and it is too bad there weren't more of them. I don't often laugh until it hurts at what I see on the screen; but during those drill scenes, I feared for my ribs. The rest of the audience apparently got just as much kick out of it as I did. Although there were a few liberties taken with military regulations, the picture as a whole stuck amazingly close to them.

METROPOLITAN is going to make up for Corporal Kate, if it makes a few more like *The Heart Thief*. This picture, which was very capably directed by Nils Olaf Chrisander, was very well done and managed to keep me interested right up to the final fade-out. That shows it must have been good, because I had to sit through *Paradise For Two* just before it was shown. The opening sequence was a bit jerky and vague, but as soon as the picture got fairly started, it flowed along nicely. I said in a previous number that Goldwyn had a wonderful team of cameramen in *Barnes and Brannigan*. They had better look out, because Henry Cronjager, who filmed *The Heart Thief*, did one of the finest jobs that has ever come from Metropolitan. Chrisander had a wonderful cast in this picture. Nearly all the leads were performers of recognized ability. Robert Edeson did very well, and so did Charles Gerrard and Joseph Schildkraut. Lya de Putti, although she looked out of place with blonde curls, did very well. However, the member of the cast I liked best was Bill Bakewell. It was the first time I had seen him on the screen, but his work was excellent. However, after all is said and done, Mr. Chrisander himself was the biggest reason for the excellence of the picture. If he continues to make pictures like this one, he will be one of the biggest directors in the business in a short time.

CHARACTER actors in the moving pictures have an easy life, because they stick out so far from the members of the cast who are doing just straight acting that they are conspicuous. That is probably the reason why nearly every actor and actress desires character work. It is so easy to steal the picture when the actor is stacked up against those who have no chance to do very much act-

ing. Of course this applies only to pictures with the lesser stars, as no one has yet stolen any pictures from the stars of the United Artist organization. Since United Artists' pictures are the exception rather than the rule, the argument is fairly logical. The most striking illustration of this fact was the performance of the man who had the title role in *The Magician*, because his success was more efficient casting than acting ability. He had a very vicious look, which stood him in good stead when it became necessary for him to be villainous. Comedy relief actors also are over-estimated as a rule, although there are some very fine ones, like Clyde Cook, who deserve all the favor they get. With even fair direction, a comedian can take the picture quite easily, even if he is not a particularly good actor. The hardest part of the character actor's job comes when he sees all his best work cut out.

WHEN a famous book is put on the screen as a moving picture, it is not a good idea to see it if one has read the book. I guess that advice is good, because so many well-read people have given it. If I had read the book, perhaps I wouldn't have enjoyed *One Increasing Purpose*; in fact I had been told that I wouldn't like it, whether I had read the book or not. Well, to make a long story short, I saw it and liked it, although it was another fiendish device of Fox's to make me eat my words about not liking its pictures. The picture had a very fine cast, and all the characterizations were good. The cutting was poor, because the story jumped around so fast that it was slightly bewildering at times. The picture had exceeded length limits very evidently, but it could have been shortened some by leaving out a few scenes for which there were no use. The scene which was most unnecessary was the closing one. It was a shot of the hero driving away from the town where he had just held a meeting for the purpose of promoting happiness. The picture should have stopped at the scene which showed him talking to the crowd. On the whole, *One Increasing Purpose* is a picture which everyone should see.

THE PERFECT SAP is a picture which should be treated in the same way as *Corporal Kate*; no one in his right mind should go to it. We came in after the thing had started, which was very lucky, because there wasn't so much of it to be seen as there would have been if we had come in at the beginning. The

(Continued on page twenty)

ARMCHAIR ADVENTURES

By EDGCUMB PINCHON

..... What shall you,
O what shall you not, Sweet, do—
The celestial temptress play
And all mankind to bliss betray,
With sacrosanct cajoleries
And starry treachery of your eyes,
Tempt us back to paradise?

—FRANCIS THOMPSON.

* * *

MUCH OF my time, of late, has been valuably wasted communing from the depths of my Armchair with one of the loveliest canvases on earth, Romney's famous portrait of Lady Hamilton, not as "Bacchante" nor as "Circe," but as her own adorable self.

It is just the unveiled upper torso, a glowing gem of rosy flesh, mockingly alluring eyes, and lips of a humorous half-whimsical sweetness past expression. It is not "My Lady Hamilton," the friend of queens, that we have here, nor "The Divine Lady" of the distractingly charming "Attitudes," but "Emma," the village lass, in her rich vitality and naive loveliness, just as the peasant painter knew and loved her in the studio intimacies of an association as artistically celebrated as it was humanly impersonal and sweet.

* * *

In this respect the canvas stands unique. Thirty times did Romney record the beauty which crazed Europe; but only once did he vouchsafe us this immortal glimpse of laughing, michievous, girlish simplicity. And from the technical standpoint I am inclined to count it among the greatest works of his brush. For while I have had opportunity to enjoy only six of these thirty portraits, these six are credited with being among the best; and they cannot, in my judgment, compete for the subtle rendering of flesh tones, beauty of composition and soft brilliancy of color, with this canvas which reigns as royally over the little group of Old Masters in Welford Beaton's library as ever the original did over the kings and captains of her day.

* * *

And so when a painter friend suggested that I read E. Barrington's *The Divine Lady*, a recent novel based on the life of Lady Hamilton, I seized upon the idea as an excellent excuse for sticking to my Armchair and ignoring telephone calls. There I sat, hour after hour, lifting my eyes automatically at the turn of each page to this painted witchery on the wall, until between the splendour of the canvas and the realism of the book I almost lost my head, like Francis Thompson on a similar occasion. But he fell in love with a statue! And that, of course, was an inexcusable performance, even though it gave us

the immortal lines which head these Adventures. But what burst of song would he have given us if he had sat in my Armchair?

* * *

Of the book, what shall I say? I am still a little dizzy from those eyes! But it is an Homeric tale, faithful to fact, and told in the reserved, yet sympathetic, style of the English woman novelist at her best. The prose has the charm of a cultivation which makes no effort at cleverness and achieves its effect by a constant sincerity lit with flashes of whimsical humour.

How shall I make this royal, prodigal tale live in a paragraph? Imagine to yourself Emma beside her father's forge, only fifteen, yet tall, with beautiful length of limb, full breasted, and carrying her little head loaded with masses of amazing auburn hair, like a young goddess. Her eyes are "sea-blue, and changeable as the sea itself. In one of them floats a little brown speck." The warmth of an abounding vitality glows in her cheeks and expresses itself in her swift, lithe movements. * * *

She is poor, illiterate, and is put out "at service." Seduced and deserted, still a child of fifteen, she becomes the mistress of a naval officer, then of a brutal country squire, who having gotten her with a child throws her again upon the street. Here Greville, the aristocrat, connoisseur in lovely things, finds her. To him she is not a human being but a new and more arresting "objet de luxe." Cool, wise, supercilious and firm-willed, he adopts her as mistress, child and pupil; and for four years devotes himself to her education. Especially he tries to eradicate from her simple psychology those elemental traits of bad temper and flamboyancy so distasteful to the British code.

His pupil is apt, too apt. Under his skilled tutelage her progress is amazing; and she comes to love him with all the devotion of a young wife. But Greville tires. By the most devious and patient diplomacy he manages to convey her into the arms of Sir William Hamilton, his elderly wealthy uncle, then British Ambassador at the Court of Naples. Not until much later does the unsuspecting Emma discern the trick which has been played upon her; and the discovery destroys in her "the last trace

of her virginity of soul." Thence forward she must watch, and fight for her own.

* * *

Hamilton, another Greville, but warmer, kindlier, more humanely decent, she learns to love, first as mistress and finally as wife. This is the period of her glory. Her beauty, her wit, her matchless voice, her social gifts, her abundant generosity, and presently her amazing diplomatic skill, make her not only the idol of the people, and the favorite of the court, but the honored hostess of the Hamilton mansion and the delight of the distinguished guests who frequent it. Even the great Goethe pays her an abundant homage.

Presently comes Captain Nelson to the Hamilton home. Wretchedly unsupported by his home government in his task of destroying the French fleet in the Mediterranean, "without even ropes for the spars," he comes begging for permission to re-victual in Neapolitan ports. There are difficulties in the way; for the King is secretly in league with Bonaparte, while the Queen is the outspoken ally of England. It is Emma who now shows herself a power to be reckoned with.

She not only over-rules the King's wishes and obtains his permis-

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sion for Nelson to re-victual his fleet wherever he pleases; but herself sends barge after barge of choice provisions to the half-starving British tars. Thence forward she is "The Lady of the Fleet," the toast of every Jack afloat, Nelson's trusted agent ashore, and one of the secret diplomatic powers of Europe. So greatly did Napoleon fear her skill and influence that he sent agents to England to dig up and publish the records of her past in the hope of discrediting her before the world.

* * *

When revolution fomented by Bonaparte breaks out in Naples it is Emma and Nelson who personally, like comrades-in-arms, spirit away the King and Queen with all their treasures to the safety of Palermo. The fame of this joint exploit resounds throughout Europe. Thence forward the names of these two magnificent children, for such they were, great captain and great courtesan, are inseparably linked.

Meanwhile Hamilton, already sixty when he first met Emma, has reached an age when he desires only peace and seclusion. With the consummate tact of his type he quietly withdraws from the situation while covering Emma with his name, and leaves these two predestined lovers to fulfil a passion as brief and tragic as it is profound.

When at last, as a matter of both personal and official necessity, the three return to England, it is to be received with wild plaudits by the people; but with deadly coldness by the Court. For there is Fanny, Nelson's wife, now Lady Nelson! His married life has been beautiful and untroubled, also it has been childless. Never has it been thrilling! Caught in the ancient dilemma Nelson loses his head and behaves badly. Emma behaves worse. British propriety is outraged. Only the birth of his little girl, Horatia, relieves for Nelson, the darkness of these days.

* * *

Then comes word that the French fleet has been sighted off the coast of France. Nelson knows well that he is going to his last fight. His child-like words "Kiss me, Hardy," as he lies bleeding to death on the deck of the Victory, close the tale.

What of "The Divine Lady?" The novelist, who, in this case, is equally the historian, draws the curtain there, adding only that her life from that time went down into the darkness of "tragic trivialities."

One could have wished it otherwise; but how could it have been? Those were the days when there were but four or five roles open to women; wife, spinster, druge, prostitute, mistress. A few actresses, a few women of literary genius managed to extricate themselves from the common lot. That is all. Emma from childhood was virtually compelled to be dependent for existence itself on the favor of some man. Her whole genius, therefore, had been poured forth in the art of reflecting with added

glories the mind and will of her master and mate. What room here was there for the achievement of an independent and self-poised personality?

Hers was essentially the tragedy of unrestraint. She would restrain herself admirably to please her lord; but not to please her own soul. Therefore when the firm, kindly, clever hand of Hamilton was withdrawn, she became reckless, vain-glorious and flamboyant. Nelson, so far from curbing her for her own and his own good, abandoned himself helplessly to her luxuriant and imperious charm. Still her genuine love for him, the first spontaneous passion of her life, aided her to maintain some co-ordination of soul; but his death withdrew even this. What master could she hope again like Hamilton, what mate like Nelson?

Thereafter the rich energies of her nature were dissipated among the vulgarities which surrounded her and fed her vanity to feed their own. To the last, however, she retained her boundless generosity, her instinctive kindness, and even much of her vivacious charm. So sets her sun in "sullied splendour"—a child of the people who could not stand, (and who shall blame her?) an elevation above thrones.

* * * * *

Kant was a philosopher; Jesus was a sage. The one lived in his intellect alone; the other in the full splendour of his instincts and intuitions as well. To the philosopher the world is an object of thought, a challenge to his powers of intellectual statement; to the sage it is the garden of his spirit, the opportunity of his self-realization, a challenge to his instincts of freedom and dominion with their cry for "more life" and a "joy that is full."

The philosophers we know; they safely are enshrined in the grand cultures of the world. But the sages few of us may know; for their lives shone too brightly on their time to escape being shrouded in popular myth, while their words were too simple to escape a like fate at the hands of the makers of creeds.

* * *

In the sage, as in a lesser degree in women and children, intuition leaps beyond the reasoned processes of thought. Brimmed with direct Vision he speaks after the Fact and in the plain language of the market. And if it be true that the common folk hear him gladly and lay hold of a new sense of the sweetness and majesty of life, it also is tragically true that this very simplicity robs succeeding generations of the like boon. For at his death his name is stolen to adorn the temples of the superstitious while his teaching, corrupted and misinterpreted, becomes the official cant of a new priesthood. Thus while the grand cultures are the lasting monuments of the philosophers, the great religions are merely the dishonored tombs of those few mighty ones—the sages, as the squalid Buddhism of India is of Lord Guatama, and our senile Christianity is of Jesus.

It is of special moment, therefore, when there appears among us one who combines in some measure the qualities both of the philosopher and of the sage, giving to the world a reasoned doctrine that also is an inspired way of life; for rarely do these two orders combine in a single personality. I can recall, indeed, but three: Sankara, Plotinus and Emerson. And while I do not wish to infer that Count Herman Keyserling will rank with these in his influence upon the world, or that he is more than a man of singular insight gifted with an unusual ability to express himself in terms acceptable to modern intelligence, there can be no doubt about the value of one so powerfully poised that in the midst of the most precise philosophic exactitude he never for a moment loses the splendour of his vision or the practicality of his evangel.

* * *

Count Keyserling lives in Darmstadt, Germany, where for some years he has been conducting what he calls "The School of Wisdom." Its aim, he says is—

"to reconstruct life on the basis of fully realized significance." That is an arresting sentence. As likewise is this—

"Realized truths evolve creative powers in the individual who is willing to let himself be transformed by their influence. The most wonderful thing in psychic life is that ideas clearly comprehended succeed, in the long run, by means of subconscious processes, in creating actual realities which correspond to them."

Both are sentences lustrous with inspiration and practical import. And that is why this subtlet of dialecticians is also like to be a highly provocative force in modern life; and to fulfil for us in good measure the double roles of a philosopher to the intellect and a sage to the heart and will. New truth we cannot have. New statement of immemorial truth we must have, or perish. And here comes

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one who seems fitted to make that re-statement, and with such depth of vision and exactitude of thought as charms, challenges and inspires.

In this matter of grappling with the spiritual reality of our existence most of us who are not wholly asleep, I take it, have abandoned the ancient gods and creeds, and this by instinct rather than by any reasoned process of rejection. The "old-time religion" simply bores us, while the new-fangled cults and creeds which have striven to take its place in the popular esteem offend our good sense with their shallow and preposterous assumptions.

We are content, for the most part, that the simple endeavor to make something worth while out of our lives, should endow us with a measure of insight, sympathy and responsibility, and that friendship and family love, rather than prophet and priest, should be our mentors. We let it go at that, confident with Emerson that "a few sound instincts and a few plain rules suffice."

It may not be a very exalted line of march but at least it makes no pretensions; and if I may offer a verdict upon my fellowmen it is that those who thus confide in life, and cannot, with the best will in the world, tell by what chart they sail, are the most securely trusted, the most readily loved.

And yet few of us are really satisfied. Our position is at best an honest compromise; for who has not felt at times that there is that to him which is not contained between his hat and boots? What-we-are forever presses against what-we-think-we-are. So that when there comes one who proposes so simple a doctrine as an effort toward a fuller realization of the significance which lurks beneath our routine of living, beneath our working, fighting, thinking, mating, we already are disposed to listen.

Something of Keyserling's quest for this "self-conscious realization of life in its every aspect," we have seen in his "Travel Diary of a Philosopher," a book, however, marred a good deal by an over-tortuous introspection and not a little pedantry. But these are defects completely banished from his latest work "The Book of Marriage." Here he strikes directly into his subject with a condensed perfection of thought which will require much patient conning by the average reader before he gleans its true worth. For this reason, and at the grave risk of doing but imperfect justice to the author, I propose briefly to rehearse the main thesis as simply as I may.

The solution of the marriage problems rests in our ability to realize the significance of marriage—what it really means. Marriage, says Keyserling, is not a natural state, as is infancy or adolescence, not an imposition of destiny as are birth and death, but it is an artistic creation of man's own spirit, a cultural condition which

is the pre-requisite of his spiritual growth.

In marriage which unites two blood streams from an infinite past to transmit them to an infinite future, both parties enter upon not a purely personal adventure, but upon a cosmic contract whose implications are aeonic, immense and over-ruling. Thus it is that law and custom have come to emphasize the social significance of marriage with the pomp of religious and legal ceremonial.

In other words he who marries a wife, marries a world, becomes an initiate in the cosmic order and an actor in the racial drama, and has taken the initial step towards maturity, self-awareness and wisdom. Whether it turn out to be so will depend however on the extent to which both parties are aware of what it is that is taking place between them, whether it seem to them a merely sentimental romance, or whether it be realized for the beautiful and majestic adventure in mutual destiny which it really is.

Not only so but marriage itself while it is a mating is never a merging. Rather it is a state of fixed tension between two poles which never can become identical nor even take the first step toward the invasion of each other's essential unity and solitude. It is part of the tragic beauty of love that you must always be you, I must always be I. But that bi-polar state of tension where it is at all vital and active creates as do two electric nodes, a definite "elliptical field of force," which is the marriage itself, a spiritual entity existing apart from, and above, both parties, and yet dependent upon them for its existence. It is this joint creation which constitutes the value and significance of marriage. It is the soil proper for the growth of the human soul, a "cultural condition" of individual fulfillment.

To this, therefore, the new spiritual home which all unawares they make for themselves, the true substance of which the material home is but the shadow, that husband and wife owe their allegiance, and no longer exclusively to themselves nor to each other. To It, this new and wonderful creation of the spirit of man, they owe the homage of self-discipline and such service as an artist pays to the work between his hands, all regardless of personal whim or inconvenience or the pettiness of amour propre.

In this view marriage recovers an ancient dignity in a new and more enlightened guise. To Keyserling it certainly is no affair of bath-robe and slippers, no romantic haven of indolent bliss, but an athletic adventure in "mutual destiny" whose object is not happiness per se, but that growth and achievement, without which indeed there can be no happiness worth the name. And if this seem stern

doctrine to silliness, the truth cannot alter its face to suit the immature; and what romance, indeed, of me and thee, can match this spiritual co-partnership in that which transcends the little self of each, the creation of a sphere of growth and unfolding, wherein "I through thee may become more greatly what I am; and Thou through me may likewise become more greatly what thou art." That is a love compact which illumines the soul with its starry beauty; and turns the little prattle of "I love you, and you love me; and we are going to be happy ever after," into the amusing nonsense of babes.

And if one says, "But what is the practical import of that for work-a-day folks?," Keyserling's answer is precise and important. It is sufficient, he says, that having become convinced of truth, you simply submit yourself to its influence; and it, of itself, will evolve in you the creative powers which, without your being aware of their operation, will produce for you in the realm of your personal experience the realities corresponding. Here again we have ancient truth re-stated in precise modern terminology—"Whatsoever a man thinketh in his heart so is it with him." The tragedy of marriage especially in America with its ratio of one divorce to every two marriages, is that lovers seek in wedlock something which is not there. Disappointed and dispirited they sue for divorce, whereas had they known what to look for they would have found something nobler than they had dreamed.

Of the illuminating thesis which Keyserling builds on this foundation there is here no room to speak. "The Book of Marriage" is a book to be studied by the individual for himself, and re-studied until the vision which lies back of its technical sentences is re-born in his own mind. I have here space only to allude to the interesting genesis of this work.

The School of Wisdom, in addition to its regular course of instruction, holds annual sessions, attended by the best minds in Europe for the discussion of world problems. Last year the subject of this new "meeting of the wise men" was "Marriage"; and the results of that discussion are embodied in the present work and wrought into unity by the magnificent editorial introductions of Keyserling himself.

Thus we have here a compilation which has essential unity, the work of experts, such as Havelock Ellis, C. C. Jung, Jacob Wassermann, Thomas Mann, Alfred Adler, Leo Frobenius, Ernest Kretschmer, Sir Rabindranath Tagore, Beatrice M. Hinkle and Baroness Leonie Ungern-Sternberg, swept into harmony by the depth of Keyserling's own thought which will be found to underlie and enhance each part of the whole.

FROM MY SEAT IN THE THEATRE

By ELISE DUFOUR

IN FRANCE, Germain Berton was acquitted for killing a man mistaken for Leon Daudet; the jury decided that the killing did not constitute murder since there was no intent to kill the victim in question.

While such loose Latin morals offend or amuse us, an examination of the facts makes us realize that the law of Moses never has had any very great reverence even in the United States, and perhaps has less than ever it had; for indeed, murder of every degree thrives with us amazingly.

The Illinois farmer may think he reads the Chicago "murder sheet" only because he is indignant. He may fool himself into believing he does not enjoy murders, even when they have become more important to his morning coffee than sugar. Nevertheless murder remains the most popular of all the stimulations offered by the newspapers that print all "the news that's fit to print." Our newspapers have so specialized in this sport that we can enjoy the murders of young children, the mutilation and killing of lovers, etc., as we do sweet music over the radio.

* * *

And now at last, the American stage is waking up to the fact that the national predilection for murder has great box-office possibilities. Of course, in the theatre we always have had killings of one kind or another but murder never has been accorded its rightful prominence in the description of daily American life. In the last three months in Hollywood three plays have been presented dealing with murder. At the Wilke's Theatre The American Tragedy ran to crowded houses for many weeks, to be followed by The Noose; while at the Music Box a comedy called Chicago tells the story of Roxie Hart, Chicago's most beautiful murderess.

Chicago, produced in the robust slap-stick style of vaudeville, rather than in the more artistic method of the legitimate stage, is a burlesque that might have been a satire. The play is distinctly clever and gives a fair picture of the way in which murder cases are managed by lawyers, courts and newspapers. A crowded house laughs heartily at the exposure of the hypocrisy of the law.

* * *

Nancy Carroll is a murderess good to look at, the kind who says "Don't sob your stuff; play it kid, for all its worth." She is most skillful in making her slender young body expressive of the reactions of the bold modern emotional moron. The play moves fast without a dull moment and the cast is adequate. Clark Gable as the

newspaper reporter gives a flawless performance.

At the conclusion of the play "extra paper" is called. In it is printed an exclusive story by Roxie Hart. The following extract may prove provocative to some hidden sense in the American voter, "Thank God I am free. It has been a grand and glorious adventure, being on trial for the murder of a man. It is the finest educational course any girl could get."

* * * * *

The Noose is a serious play which also moves with good tempo. It is the story of a boy "Nickie" Elkins who does not know the identity of his parents but who has been brought up by Buck Gordon, man of the underworld, now a bootlegger in danger of going to Atlanta. Nickie has fallen in love with a girl above him in station and he wants to elevate himself.

Buck Gordon, afraid of losing so valuable a slave, puts an end to the boy's aspirations by telling him that he is a bastard and that he, Gordon is his father. His mother, having run away when she was eighteen has worked her way up and is now the wife of the governor. Buck calls her his "ace in the hole," and says she will save him from prison. Rather than subject his mother to this, the boy in a quarrel shoots Gordon and the case arouses even more interest than does the ordinary murder because Nickie gives no motive and obviously wants to die.

* * *

The play opens in the home of Governor Bancroft. The lawyer and the Governor's wife plead for the youthful killer who is sentenced to hang. No one knows anything about him. William Holden who plays the part of the Governor is a most delightful and skillful actor. The role of the mother could become one of the great parts of the theatre. One wonders what an Emma Dunn or a Haidee Wright would have made of it.

De Maupassant in "Jean and Pierre" draws the character of a woman in a situation which might suggest finesse to one studying the role of Stella Bancroft. Pauline Crill, however, who plays the part of the Governor's wife cannot be said to show much conception of the conduct of a mother concealed in the person of the Governor's clever and adored wife. She moves without grace or feeling, while opposite her William Holden lives his part and never makes a movement that is not significant.

* * *

Stanley Taylor as "Elkins" does some very good restrained work. He is brought before the governor and his wife and hears the woman whom

he alone knows to be his mother begging for his life. The Governor refuses to stay the sentence. The closing of the act is well directed and significant. A moment of tenderness between the husband and wife alone on the stage, a little sentimental crying for a lad who is to be hanged and both exit,—the Governor at the back and his lady at the side.

The Governor closes the door on his exit, but the streamers of Mrs. Governor's gown gleam in the darkness. Audible is the building of the scaffold where the boy is to be hanged in the morning. The streamers disappear and the Governor's wife returns and plies her way rather than walks across the stage. Her movement should be expressive of sudden purpose but it is not.

* * *

The boy is not executed because a message comes over the Governor's private wire, in a muffled voice supposed to be his. The message commands that the execution be delayed because the boy's mother is coming to see him. The next morning the executive mansion is naturally thrown into a panic when it is learned that it was a false telephone message to save the boy from hanging. Elkins has given the warden a letter for his mother thinking he is to die, but being reprieved he is frantic to regain it. He is again taken before the Governor and now comes the opportunity for subtle poignant acting between mother and son, but nothing happens.

Whether the Governor's wife reads her son's letter or not is not made apparent. It falls into her hands and is returned unopened to the Governor. The boy is pardoned but must go to prison for a while. Mrs. Governor tells Elkins that he will come to them as soon as he is free. She makes a sentimental speech about a mother's heart and kisses the boy. What a great chance! But in spite of that William Holden in the background is the only reality on the stage.

Pauline Crill is at her best in her speech when she almost convinces her husband that in his confused state of mind he did send that telephone message which saved the boy's life.

* * *

The second act of The Noose during which Elkins shoots Gordon is finely conceived and well played. Conspicuous in ease and in dramatic ability are William Gould playing "Come-on Conly" and Walter C. Percival playing "Buck Gordon." Ruth Renick is more than adequate even if she does at times step out of her part. Her best work is, of course, the pathetic bit when she asks the

Governor for Elkin's body.

The play is improbable but that is never important. It has a little propaganda against prohibition but that is not long enough to be tiresome. "The Noose" is entertaining, sustaining the interest until the end and it can boast of at least three actors of the first rank.

* * * * *

The Firebrand, by Edwin Justice Mayer, presents also the pleasures of murder, but in the romantic spirit and in the distant haze of the golden days of Florence. A paradox begins the comedy, that of charming, swaggering Ian Keith impersonating the robust artist Benvenuto Cellini. Though the play has no Florentine quality, the voices being strongly flavored by the great open spaces of America, the performance overcomes such details, rocking an enthusiastic audience in laughter.

Apparent is the sure touch of Frank Reicher revealed in the lightness of tempo, the artistic covering of the stage, in that subtle aliveness that the artist-director alone knows how to draw out of his players.

* * *

Some authorities consider it unfortunate to open a play, particularly a comedy, with a dialogue between minor characters. If the hero must have his way prepared, a group will start the ball rolling more briskly than can the love-making of obscure actors. It is gratifying and exacting to have the theatre crowded with old friends who are ecstatic over seeing an actor in red tights, but it makes his first entrance difficult if he has more than doublet and hose to bring to his part, and Ian Keith has.

Leaning against the door, his slim red length punctuated by his expressive face, he was as arresting as was the gleeful applause of a crowded house, largely sprinkled with movie stars and directors.

* * *

Benvenuto appears fresh from sporting with the gentle art of murder. But this time the Duke Allisandro De Medici, no doubt jealous of his subject's pleasures, is hot on his heels. Though Cellini, like the modern killer, has no taste for paying the penalty of such revels and is perturbed by the possibility that he may be forced to do so, yet he has time for love. His love-making, though set in the sixteenth century is quite modern, a brand particularly well known about Hollywood. Of course, today, one must dress love up in romantic terms, especially if one has anything to do with movies. That's imperative. Cellini's love is unmasked and the audience greatly enjoys this frankness about fundamentals.

It is like this: Cellini buys his sweetheart, but wriggles out of the payment of the ducats. He is not concerned with anything inside of his adored one,—ideas, morals, inner beauty, but with externals, such as hair, eyes and form,—in short, the

artist Cellini chooses for his sweetheart that most popular type that the Southern negro so aptly calls "a walk-off." This is a much more elegant expression than that of "dumbell."

* * *

The negro explained his expression thus: "When Gawd made de people he made dem out of de clay down by de rivah and stood dem up by de wall to dry. But befo' he could put de brains in some of dem, dey jus' done walk off." Elsie Bartlett played well the part of a young walk-off with an American accent.

William Farnum as De Medici was altogether delightful, never slipping out of his part and having a deliciously light and sprightly touch. He revealed how little man has changed since the old Florentine days: that even the boldest quails when it comes to his relationship with a wife who can say with authority, "You thought I was the Duchess, I am the Duke." Ethel Clayton does not put this over. Perhaps she has done too much silent work on the screen; for the sort of woman she is supposed to portray always possesses an arresting and very clear voice.

* * *

The first act went a little too heavily in the manner of melodrama rather than of comedy. But perhaps that was because the audience did so much acting that the stage could not get an even chance. But the second act clicked mirthfully and was altogether successful.

The Duke has carried away the walk-off Angela to the summer palace where his wife has unexpectedly arrived bringing with her Cellini, commanded by the Duke to stay in his own house until De Medici gets around to hanging him. The Duke is nervously enthusiastic about Angela. Cellini indulges in another murder, after which he scales the balcony of the Duchess and with his arms about her amusingly keeps his ear cocked for his pursuers. For is not self-preservation stronger than love? And be-

sides, he does not love the Duchess, but Angela, who at this moment is in the Duke's bedroom which is adjacent to that of the Duchess. The wife, who is "the Duke" goes to investigate her husband's state of sleepiness before leading her lover into the darkness of her chamber. Cellini waits uneasily, listening for the approach of the soldiers who are whipping the bushes for him. The Duke's window opens and he and Angela emerge. Cellini hides. With well-acted comedy the husband hears the Duchess knocking and shutting Angela out on the balcony goes into his room to disarm suspicion—a very modern play, you see!

Cellini abducts the "walk-off" and in the last act after having spent a blissful night with Angela disillusionment sets in according to the general pattern. He narrowly escapes hanging by using his wits and by again deceiving the Duchess into thinking he is her lover. He bestows Angela upon the graceful Duke who takes her away. The play ends satisfactorily by the coming of a little page to give Cellini again the key to the bedroom of the Duchess.

Dickson Morgan is to be congratulated on the effectiveness of his settings.

H. TIPTON STECK WRITER

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YOUTHFUL CRITIC

(Continued from page fourteen)

thing which turned me against it most strongly was the set of would-be wise-cracking titles. The whole thing was silly enough without injecting a terrible titling job. As we came after it had started, we didn't see who wrote the titles; but if he is wise, he will go away and hide for awhile. Whoever wrote them never heard the quotation, "Brevity is the soul of wit." They were so long and involved that it was impossible to understand what was meant to be the humor. The story was as old as it very well could be and was boring in the extreme. The cast was rather poor, probably because it showed very little interest in what it was doing. Virginia Lee Corbin gave the best performance of the whole bunch, but one scene where she and Ben Lyon were kissing each other almost made me sick. Pictures like *The Perfect Sap* are the ones which drive people from the theatres.

THE BRUTE

As I look over my proofs of this number, I find that I have not given credit to all those who made contributions to the excellence of *The Brute*, reviewed elsewhere. Harvey Gates made a very fine adaptation of the novel of the same name by Douglas Newton, and Jack Jarmuths wrote the titles, which must have been good, for I don't remember anything about them, as should be the case with all titles. However, I remember that they were punctuated badly, as is the case with all Warner titles.

OLD TIMERS ALL RIGHT

The Los Angeles Times has a page story stating that the day of the young director is at hand, and cites W. K. Howard, William Wellman and Paul Sloane, among others. Consistent with the asinine manner in which producers run things, there probably will be a tendency to give a director

an important picture solely because he is young. I can't quite see wherein directing differs from any other pursuit in life in that experience is necessary to make a success of it. The young directors are interesting because of the promise they hold. They will have a decided influence on the future of the screen, but its present is much safer in the hands of the best of the old, experienced men who almost know what it is all about. There are some things in life that we can learn only by experience and they are among the things that a director should know.

A title in *The Yankee Clipper* draws attention to "clashing colors" in a street scene in a Chinese city. The scene is shot in black and white. Until such scenes are presented in colors it would seem to be the better part of wisdom not to draw attention to the colors that are in them. Mentioning colors in a title and showing the scenes without them is somewhat absurd.

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FILM SPECTATOR

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No. 8

IN THIS NUMBER

— 0 —

"THE KING OF KINGS"

Cecil B. de Mille Puts on the Screen His Conception of Some Incidents in Life of Christ, and Gives Us an Important Picture.

— 0 —

"AFTERMATH"

A Foreign-made Motion Picture Shown Here Has Much in It That Hollywood Could Emulate with Benefit to the American Screen

— 0 —

SURRENDER

CHINESE PARROT

TWO ARABIAN KNIGHTS

WHERE TRAILS BEGIN

LOVERS

BITTER APPLES

TOO MANY WOMEN

— 0 —

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THINK about motion pictures.*

HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 11, 1927

Cecil de Mille and "The King of Kings"

THE supreme theme has been used. Jesus has come to the screen and De Mille has given us a picture which will tend to standardize the world's conception of the New Testament. It was a great thing that Cecil de Mille conceived and executed—something that will live for a long, long time and which will gross more money than any other picture ever made. De Mille has one of the best business minds in pictures and making *The King of Kings* was the most brilliant stroke of his successful business career. He has made a picture that the public will buy for the next score of years, and has given the world something that supplements magnificently its most widely read book. He has given the screen a new dignity, thus being of infinite service to it. The business of the screen being to sell art, De Mille has become its supreme salesman by producing art that all the world will buy. He has loomed large in the history of motion pictures, but this picture will bring to him imperishable fame. Not only has he dealt impressively with an impressive theme, but he has given us a new conception of the possibilities of the motion picture camera to paint pictures of surpassing beauty. *The King of Kings* certainly is a thing of beauty, of great and glorious beauty that is a monument to the artistic sense of its creator. From every standpoint it is the most important picture ever made. It will add enormously to the already established patronage of pictures by attracting to theatres millions of people who have been holding aloof. That is one of the services De Mille has performed for the screen. All honor to him for his supreme achievement. I never have written for *The Spectator* anything more sincere than this tribute to De Mille's genius. It is astonishing that he has merited it by giving the screen its most tiresome picture. I have viewed it twice. The first time it bored

me, but I blamed myself, not it. I went to it a second time with my mind made up that I would see merit in it that had escaped me the first time. I never approached a picture more sympathetically, with a greater determination to enjoy it. I so informed Cecil de Mille before the screening began at the opening of the Chinese Theatre, and I hope he felt that I was sincere. But again I was bored. We had a party of nine people at the opening and eight of them thought *The King of Kings* very tiresome indeed. I have such respect for Mr. de Mille's business astuteness that I am prepared to believe that he assumed that we would be bored, but did not lose sight of the fact that the world would pay to see his picture even though it applauded it with its yawns. The man who entertained us with the engrossing drama of *The Volga Boatman* knows that the story's the thing, yet went about giving us a picture without a story simply because he had a saleable theme. Only a foolish person would have done otherwise. De Mille visualized his picture and filmed it magnificently as he saw it. He was absolutely honest about it and gave the public all that could be crowded within his conception of a picture about Christ. If that conception was inspired by business consideration or artistic emotions I have no way of knowing. But I know the outcome—that the simplest man in all history made this screen appearance in a picture devoid of simplicity. Great scenes pile upon one another until the eye tires and the brain refuses to absorb them. Fourteen reels without a connected and dramatic story running all through them are too many. De Mille made an heroic attempt to crowd into one picture enough about Jesus to make a half dozen pictures. Instead of six entertaining films we get one that tires us.

IN APPRECIATION

Oh, we labor and we worry and we have to pay our bills;
We are cogs within a system, we are grist within the mills,
And we're ground beneath the pressure of divers petty
woes—

But, thank God for our producers and our motion picture
shows!

For when we're razzled, fagged and dazzled and our nerves
are frazzled bare,

Then—oh, the gracious solace of a wide and cushioned
chair,

Where we can loll in comfort—no other place to go—
Oh—believe us—we are grateful for the motion picture
show!

When friends drop in to see us, for whose bent of conver-
sation

We feel a lack of interest or a strong disinclination;
When we've social obligations that we feel we must per-
form;

Or when the day is chilly, or when the day's too warm;
Or when we're merely weary and want to rest and doze—
Oh then, how grateful are we for the motion picture shows!

Oh, the show's an institution that we ill could do without;
Its diversified conceptions resolve our minds from doubt
Of manners, styles and customs from Cairo to Nome,
Or the same, in their relation to our own dear native
home;

It panders to emotions with a thousand varied wiles;
It waxes the shade of Sadness, or the joyous elf of Smiles.
Oh, it saddens and it gladdens in 'most every way we know,
But it's chiefest claim to favor is—just as a place to go.

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

Lack of Story Is Chief Weakness

THE opening sequence of *The King of Kings* is a gorgeous one in color, whose contribution to the story is the planting of the fact that Mary Magdalene was a courtesan, something, by the way, that is established in a title that introduces the sequence. Later in the picture the woman taken in adultery is thrust before us without notice. No elaborate sequence is introduced to establish her status. Mary's presence in the picture is to give an opportunity to depict Jesus performing the miracle of casting out of her the seven deadly sins; the other is there to offer an excuse for showing the scene of "casting the first stone." Therefore the two women have equal story value, yet one is introduced in a gorgeous sequence and the other without any ceremony. Mr. de Mille no doubt will defend this with the argument that the opening sequence is a glittering one that has great production value, that it was included for its pictorial merit. I quite agree with him, and compliment him upon the magnificence of it, but offer it as an excuse for accepting *The King of Kings* simply as a motion picture and viewing it as such. Granting that its theme will make it successful, let us dismiss the box office considerations from our minds and treat it solely as a screen production. It has the one major fault of being devoid of any story value. A son was born to a carpenter of Nazareth; he became a teacher and his teachings have influenced mankind more than those of any other person in all history. Although more than nineteen centuries have elapsed since the baby was born in Nazareth, those who are influenced by his teachings feel his presence to-day as potently as did his contemporaries who heard his voice. There is a dramatic story for you, the most dramatic in all history. There was merit in the teachings of Christ—as there was merit in the teachings of Confucius who gave the world its greatest code of ethics; as there is merit in any teachings that are good—and those who followed Christ sought to continue his work by spreading his gospel. It was at a time when the mind of the world was primitive, and to make it more susceptible to the wise teachings, Christ was credited with divine origin and a power to perform miracles. To put it in modern language, the followers of Christ displayed good showmanship in selling him to the world. We know that such a man existed and that his teachings have been of great good to humanity. We know also that no man ever existed who possessed the power to perform the miracles credited to Christ. To ask us to believe that there was on earth nineteen hundred years ago a man who could raise people from the dead, that never previously nor since, has there been another, is to invite us to quarrel with our own senses. We are interested in Christ for the things he did, not for those he could not do. But De Mille does not show him as the great teacher; he does not feed our intellects upon reason. He gravely and reverently presents his Christ to us as a performer of deeds our minds reject as impossibilities, and shows us nothing of the intensely dramatic development of the lowly boy into the world's first personage. He builds to no point. He merely illustrates—gloriously, I'll admit—episodes that could not have happened and ignores those that must have. He has trampled all over a field in which other producers might have trespassed in

search of fodder. He presents the story of Judas inadequately, but spoils it for anyone else. He makes the crucifixion one of the sequences in his picture and removes it from the list of great themes that might have pictures of their own. It was a rare pasture he entered, but he fed so greedily in it that our reaction to his glutony is mental indigestion.

* * *

Picture Is Lacking in Emotional Appeal

THE *King of Kings* appealed to me neither emotionally nor intellectually. Only my sense of beauty was satisfied, and that only until it became surfeited. I did not like the first half because it was so unlike a motion picture, and disliked the second half because it was so like one. I am aware that De Mille made the picture with his eyes open and that he knew just why each scene is in it. But I can not fathom his reasoning. He knows why he did not confine himself to one miracle and build up to it, but I don't. In *The Miracle Man*, a picture without any of the glamour of this De Mille opus, we have one of the most moving scenes in screen history when Frankie Lee throws down his crutches and finds his legs strong and straight beneath him. In *The King of Kings* someone we do not know, someone for whom no sympathy is developed, throws away his crutches and we yawn and wonder when under the sun the miracles are going to end and the picture begin. The tribulations of Jesus failed to move me for he was not presented in a way that gained my sympathy. He was shown doing one thing after another that my reason rejected as being things that no man ever has been able to do. Taking him out of the ordinary human class to which he belonged put him outside the bounds of the sympathy that I ever am ready to extend to human beings. My heart can follow only where my mind leads. I am aware that the picture appeals powerfully to some people, and even if I could, I have no desire to change the minds of those who think it great, but to me it is devoid of all those things I look for in a motion picture except production, and that offends, for the story of the world's simplest man should have been told in the screen's simplest picture, not with the flamboyant imaginings of a De Mille. True, the producer reached far afield for his authorities and can plead that the records of past centuries yielded him his material. If I had not been tired by the time it was reached, undoubtedly the crucifixion would have stirred me more than it did. I read somewhere that De Mille followed both Dore and Rubens in picturing it. I do not understand how the works of two such widely different artists could be blended to make a perfect creation. I could see nothing of Rubens in the screen scenes of the three crosses, but much of Dore. I think a greater artist could have been followed, for Dore, while a great draughtsman, was by no means a master of artistic composition. I wish the De Mille research department had discovered a copy of Rubens' "Christ on the Cross," which hangs in the old Pinacothek in Munich, where I saw it. Peculiarly enough, it is technically one of the poorest works of the great master, but the conception absorbs all its faults of execution. When I viewed it I forgot paint, line, and texture, and looked upon only the stark horror of the dead Christ hanging there alone in the night against the black back-

ground of the sky that reached to the indistinct Jerusalem in the distance. The strength of death, its finality, the magnitude of the tragedy, the awfulness of the crime that the then civilization committed against the civilization that was to come, came to me with overwhelming force. Dore, whom De Mille copied, never conceived anything so great, nor do I know of anything else that Rubens has done that was half so tremendous. In the scene showing the raising of Lazarus De Mille seems to have given us his own conception. I can find no authority for the presence of a crowd at the entrance to the cave. Rembrandt painted the scene, and his conception of it probably is regarded as the authentic one. At least, lacking a better authority, we have no right to disregard him. In his painting there is only the family group. He shows Lazarus wearing a beard, but De Mille shows Kenneth Thompson without one. Judas also is beardless in the picture, yet I know of no instance in which he has been painted without one.

* * *

Last Supper Is Done Inadequately

FIFTEEN or sixteen years ago Kalem produced The Life of Christ, from the Manger to the Cross. Three of eight people seated at my dinner table the other evening remembered this picture distinctly, John Barrymore, my brother, (K. C. B.) and myself. None of the trio is religious, using the word in its narrow sense, consequently the picture could not have lingered in our memories on account of its theme. We remembered it, we agreed, on account of its great simplicity, its intensely human quality. We could not remember who played Christ, or who directed it, or such details; but we remembered that Christ was presented as a human being who had appeal. This old picture showed the birth of Christ in the stable, a beautiful sequence, as I remember it, with the Three Wise Men and a real star, for the whole picture was shot in the Holy Land. The Last Supper copied Da Vinci more closely than De Mille did, and the crucifixion was depicted in a manner that proved immeasurably more effective than the similar scenes in King of Kings. The procession to Calvary had appeal because it was shown in long shots. De Mille handles it in a cheap, blatant, movie way. The spectacle of the husky Bill Boyd having a fearful struggle to bear a load that the frail Harry Warner had struggled under apparently for miles, impressed me as an absurd and a totally wasted attempt to create sympathy. In the De Mille picture the procession could have been made dramatic if it had been shown in a long shot, with Christ bearing his cross with a mixture of pride and patience, as he did in the old Kalem picture. The Kalem people felt the picture more than De Mille felt his, for over a lapse of fifteen years I still can feel the spirit that the former made the screen reflect, while anything I received from The King of Kings wore off before I left the theatre. When I stood in the refectory in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Milan and studied the composition of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper, it was not with the purpose of storing in my mind impressions of the grouping with which I could, some years later, confound Cecil de Mille; nor was it with such intention that I viewed the finest copy of that picture in existence, that painted by Da Vinci's pupil, Marco d'

Oggiono, and which hangs in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy, London; consequently I can not recall all the fine points of this great painting sufficiently to estimate the liberties De Mille took with it, but from the original and its greatest copy, and also from the very fine copy in the Louvre, Paris, I gained something that De Mille utterly failed to put on the screen. His handling of the Last Supper sequence deprives him of the right to be credited with the production of a truly great work of art. He gave it movie treatment of the cheapest kind at a time when he might have done something notable. I do not know what warrant he had for placing Judas, in his picture merely a screen actor and not a type, on the left hand of Jesus, or by what right he sought to improve the grouping of Da Vinci. Any director who could have brought to life the amazingly expressive hands of the disciples as painted by Da Vinci, would be entitled to a niche in the hall of fame if he achieved nothing else in his entire career. It is by the number of neglected opportunities that The King of Kings reveals, that the conclusion is forced upon us that the picture in its entirety is but an indifferent realization of a magnificent chance. It is a film whose every sequence should reflect greatness, but none does. Only as a product of a commercial mind is it a brilliant success.

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The Real Jesus and H. B. Warner

H. B. WARNER'S characterization of Jesus plumbed no depths in me. I do not blame him for it. He portrays magnificently the kind of characterization that the studio conceived for the part, but he is not my Christ. I can not believe that a man with so little animation could make his voice heard down the ages. I felt that there should have been some message from the actor's soul to mine, that he should have stirred me as Warner did in Silence, as Janet Gaynor does in Seventh Heaven, as Jean Hersholt does in Old Heidelberg. But I received no such message, and was a placid and unmoved spectator of Christ's suffering. I was disappointed with the temple sequence, for every picture depicting it shows Jesus in great wrath, but in the screen version he shows but little emotion. The generally accepted conception of the appearance of Christ is that his hair was long. Da Vinci, Correggio, Titian, Raphael, Rembrandt, and the less famous Durer, Reni, and Matsys—surely an imposing list of authorities—depict him with hair much longer than Warner wore his. But I will give you a pen portrait of Jesus written by one who saw him. Expert antiquarians pronounce the letters of Publius Lentulus to be genuine. He was Roman pro-consul in Palestine and knew Jesus in Nazareth. For centuries his letters were forgotten, except by students of Latin. A Roman professor a few years ago translated them into modern Italian, and an English translation has been made of them. One will interest those who have seen the picture, for as Christ is the greatest character ever brought to the screen it follows that his characterization is the one with which the least liberties may be taken. "There has appeared here a man of strange virtue," Publius Lentulus wrote. "His disciples call him 'The Son of God.' He cures the sick and raises the dead to life. He is a very handsome man and worthy of all our attention. His hair is blond and covers his

shoulders in separate curls and is parted in the middle, after the fashion of the people of Nazareth. His forehead is smooth and serene, without marks or wrinkles; his countenance is pink; his nose is well formed; his beard, of the same color as his hair, is parted in the middle. In his gaze is an expression of wisdom and of openness; his eyes are blue, but shine terribly when he reproves people; but in conversation they are amiable. His observations are expressed with liveliness, although he always remains calm. Nobody has ever seen him laugh; but he often weeps. Of a good height and straight figure he has very beautiful hands and arms. His manner of speaking is serious. He speaks but little, and is modest. In short, he is as handsome as a man may be. They call him Jesus, the Son of Mary." In some respects Warner fits this picture, but his eyes did not "shine terribly" in any scene, not even in the temple scene when he was supposed to be in great wrath. When De Mille took Christ out of the pages of the Bible and showed him to us as a human being he should have gone all the way and shown him as really human.

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Fine Performances Mark the Picture

THE excellence of the performances is the outstanding feature of *The King of Kings*. It was a stroke of genius for De Mille to assemble for his great picture the greatest cast ever assembled for one production. There is not a single sequence that is not acted admirably. One of the finest performances, in my estimation, is that of Ernest Torrence. He makes Peter a lovable character, even though he denies his leader to save his own skin. The part calls for a considerable range of acting and Torrence is equal to all its demands. The Caiaphas of Rudolph Schildkraut is another notable performance, and Sam de Grasse, as the Pharisee, makes a big contribution to the wealth of fine acting in the picture. M. Moore, as the boy Mark, gives a performance that measures up to those of the old and experienced troupers. He has a charming, boyish personality. I have no fault to find with the manner in which Joseph Schildkraut plays Judas, but the obvious desire of the producer to keep him in the picture, by cutting him in when there was no occasion for it, finally made me tire of seeing him. Judas ceased to be of importance to the picture as soon as he had betrayed Christ, but even the great crucifixion sequence was interrupted several times to acquaint us with the misery of Judas, which had no story value. It was bad editing. The disciples who riveted my attention more than the others were Robert Edeson and James Neill, both of whom give fine performances. But to mention individually all those who make valuable contributions to the picture would occupy too much space. De Mille stuck closely to motion picture traditions by giving us none but beautiful women. It would have been a relief, and certainly would have made some of the scenes more convincing, if more of the faces had had more character and less beauty. I presume that when the picture is cut down the first thing eliminated will be the "comedy relief" scene showing the Roman soldiers catching the fish that yields no gold coin. It is silly. They are shown casting their lines in the hope that they will be rewarded as Peter was; we know they will not, and the rest should be left to our

imagination. There are several scenes in which the Pharisee is shown with Christ, but at the time of the betrayal Judas tells the Pharisee that the man he kisses will be Christ. This is in answer to the Pharisee's query as to the signal Judas will give to show which is Christ. As the Pharisee already was acquainted with the man Judas was about to betray I can not see why such titles are included in the sequence. The opening sequence reveals to what a high degree of perfection Technicolor has developed color photography. The whole picture should have been shot in color. It would have made it even more dignified and impressive. Probably the argument will be advanced that fourteen reels in natural color would tire the eye. As the motion picture screen is the only place where we always see only variations of black and white, all other objects that our eyes behold during our waking hours being various shades of color, I do not see how such argument is tenable. Supporting such reasoning is the result of an exhaustive series of experiments that Douglas Fairbanks conducted when considering natural colors for *The Black Pirate*. He discovered that colored film caused less retinal fatigue than black and white. If all of *The King of Kings* had been shown in natural colors it would have been a creation of such exquisite beauty that it would have been its own apology for its lack of entertainment.

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Lindbergh's Flight Has a Lesson in It

A YOUNG man with an ability to impress people into taking a chance on him, buys an inexpensive airplane in San Diego and flies in it to St. Louis and thence to New York. He is just an ordinary young fellow whose father is dead and whose mother teaches school. He never in all his life had done anything to attract the attention of anyone whose interest in him had not been the outgrowth of personal contact. No man has achieved anything until he is known beyond the circle of his acquaintances. Such a one was this young fellow. In quite a matter-of-fact way he announced that he was going to fly alone to Paris, and the world began to murmur the name of Charles Lindbergh. One morning Charles asked his engineer how everything was and was told that nothing needed attention. "Well, I might as well go," he said. "So long." He headed for Paris and arrived there, and when his mother learned of it she said, "I hope they'll let him go right to sleep." Nothing else in all history has thrilled the world in just the same way as the exploit of this quite ordinary young man has. The absolute simplicity of it is the secret of the thrill. "Well, I might as well go"—"I hope they'll let him go right to sleep," were as much parts of the whole drama as the droning of the engine above the trackless Atlantic. Only a perfect production could thrill the world as this one has. It gained an effect that every motion picture producer endeavors to achieve every time he makes a motion picture, but which none ever succeeded in doing. In fact, he could have proven to you in advance that the Lindbergh flight would be an awful flop from an entertainment standpoint. The story was not motivated, he would have said. It should have opened with the poor teacher about to lose her home through the foreclosure of a mortgage on it. This would have made the whole thing reasonable. And

the titles! Ye gods, the titles! Imagine a screen scene showing a man about to fly to Paris saying, "Well, I might as well go." There is not a motion picture executive in Hollywood who would have permitted such a title. The mother, of course, is an impossible character. The part she played is not at all natural. A title writer who submitted, "I hope they let him go right to sleep," would have been thrown off the lot. A real mother, when informed that her son had performed such an astonishing feat, would have drawn herself up with great dignity and would have said, "'Tis pleasing news, but only what I expected. A mother's heart beat with the engine's; the winds carried a mother's heart prayers to her boy." No producer would have permitted such a great story to be told so simply. The unfortunate feature of it is that the industry will not profit from the lesson the Lindbergh flight might teach it. Most of the executives who control production will think I have taken leave of my senses when I suggest that the flight has a message for pictures. They will be unable to see the connection. The picture business is one which prospers according to the degree in which it can manufacture thrills, either intellectual, emotional or physical, yet it lacks the mentality to analyze a thrill that is produced by some agency other than its own. Lindbergh manufactures a thrill unequalled by any other in all history and it enralls the world because of its absolute simplicity, but motion pictures attempt to achieve the same end by avoiding any semblance of simplicity. When on the screen a man reaches for his hat and stick he must be shown in a hall imposing enough for the lying-in-state of a dead emperor. The screen as a whole is unreal, expensively cheap, and vulgar. The exceptions, like *Seventh Heaven*, are its successes. The public must turn to 'real life for its supreme thrills because motion picture producers have not mastered the art of depicting real life on the screen, nor will they permit freedom in doing it to those who can.

* * *

"Aftermath" Full of Human Beings

AFTERMATH as a motion picture has many weaknesses. As a production it is vastly interesting. It proves so many things. The most important is the wisdom of putting real people on the screen. There are several sequences in it that have no story value, but they are interesting because our interest has been created in the people in them. Some definite characterization has been given to every person on the screen. The servants have personality as definitely registered as that of the leading characters. We do not make pictures that way over here. When we want a man to play a butler we call for a "butler type" despite the fact that there is no such thing in the world outside the screen. The screen has standardized butlers until all of them look alike and act alike, although the butlers in the homes of screen people differ as widely as bank presidents or brick layers. In American pictures only two or three of the leading characters are given definite personalities. All the rest are "types". I was interested in every foot of *Aftermath* because I was permitted to become acquainted with everyone in it. It is devoid of "types". We get only a short flash of a chauffeur, but while he is on the screen we see him knock the ashes out of his pipe before entering a

house. That very brief action helped to strengthen the impression that I was looking at the doings of real people. In the picture there are dozens of such touches, little as to footage, but big as contributions to the sincerity of the production. In a banquet scene a man seeks to replenish his glass. He picks up a bottle, finds it light, puts it down and picks up another from which he fills his glass. In an American picture he would pick up the right bottle the first time. We make our pictures according to mechanical laws; *Aftermath* takes into account the fact that human actions are not mechanical, consequently its individual scenes are much more convincing than those we find in the ordinary run of American pictures. The German director took into account that the wine drinker could not know which of the two dark bottles in front of him contained wine and that he was liable to pick up the empty one first. Most of our directors would be inclined to shoot the scene over again if the actor picked up the wrong bottle. It would have disturbed his tempo. *Aftermath* was directed by Erich Waschneck. I hope he does. It is important that he should if he wears the kind of wide-open shirts that our directors fancy. Having selected that one out of the one hundred and four wheezes that the name suggested to me, I will proceed to say that if his story-telling ability equalled his care for detail he would have given us a remarkable picture. The whole production gives the impression that no one directed it, that real people are being photographed doing real things. The director had excellent actors in all the parts and I am confident that he contented himself with giving them a thorough understanding of the scenes and then allowing them to play them without mechanical direction. All direction should be done that way when real actors are in the scenes, which is not often. There is a girl in *Aftermath* who looks astonishingly like a younger Pola Negri. Many of her poses are captivating. I refuse to believe that they were due to direction. I am satisfied that she lost herself in the part and that her subconscious mind ruled her actions. In no other way could such sincerity have been shown, such naturalness and freedom from histrionics. Every supervisor and director in Hollywood should see this picture and study the manner in which the people in it are shown as being so wholly and completely human.

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"Aftermath" Story Rather Wandering

AFTERMATH was made primarily for Central European audiences. One can not criticize it with full sympathy until he knows how it has fulfilled its primary mission. And to know that, he must know Central European audiences, something about which I am ignorant. I have not attended many cinemas in Europe, not being concerned with pictures on my visits there, and the only films I saw were American, Charlie Chaplin and Bill Hart being the stars I encountered most often. If *Aftermath* pleases European audiences it is a success as a production, and that fact is to be taken into account when estimating its worth. As a sample of German screen technic it emphasizes the already established fact that the Germans are good technicians, but poor story-tellers. This one wanders all over the place and embraces people who have nothing to do with it. The thread of it, however, can be followed readily until near the end when it

becomes somewhat difficult to determine what we are supposed to be interested in. It has a most fascinating girl who plays opposite a rather colorless juvenile, and the romance between them, planted at the opening, comes into the picture at intervals without drama and without complications. There is another romance between the boy's mother and the governor of the district, both parts which are played excellently, and to me this is the major love interest in the film. That a love affair between two young people is not essential to a picture, something that everyone except a producer knows, is demonstrated in *Aftermath*. It also is demonstrated that foreigners can make pictures devoid of those camera angles that we have grown to look for in them. There is not a weird shot in this picture, but there are plenty of beautiful ones, reflecting good photography and intelligent lighting. It is not fair to attribute to Alfred Hustwick, who edited and titled the picture for the American screen, the story weaknesses of *Aftermath*. He had a tough job on his hands. He was handed a positive print and had no excess film to work with. He had to use the original fade-ins and fade-outs as he found them, and was circumscribed in other ways. He had to rely largely on titles to tell the story, and he wrote excellent ones. He presumed that the characters were speaking colloquially in their own language, thus he used American colloquialisms in translating their speeches. He would have been at fault if he had made an effort to preserve a European atmosphere in the wording of the titles. *Aftermath* is the first of a series of foreign-made pictures to be imported for screening in this country. Walter W. Kofeldt has undertaken to supply American audiences with the best European productions, and it is to be hoped that the success that will crown his initial efforts will be of sufficient magnitude to warrant the continuance of the importations. Everyone engaged in picture-making in Hollywood owes it to himself to view the pictures made elsewhere. Even those who do not consider *Aftermath* superior screen entertainment can not fail to derive some benefit from viewing it. I found it quite entertaining and will look forward to the others that Mr. Kofeldt will show us. It will do none of us any harm to know that there are people in other countries besides our own who know something about motion pictures.

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Mary Philbin Does Well in "Surrender"

WHEN they were about to begin on *Lea Lyon* out at Universal I remember the papers saying that they could not make up their minds whether to cast *Lya de Putti* or *Mary Philbin* in the name part. I could not figure out how two girls who differ so greatly one from the other could be considered for the same part. I have seen the picture, now called *Surrender*, and quite approve the final decision to let *Mary Philbin* play *Lea*. The part calls for a spiritual quality which *Mary* possesses and which no characterization in which I yet have seen *Miss de Putti* indicated that she possessed. Under *Edward Sloman's* direction *Mary* gives the most satisfactory performance that stands to her credit since she registered her inaugural hit in *Merry-Go-'Round*. Her forte is heavy drama or tragedy, and she never is convincing when she gets far away from either. *Ivan Mosjukine*, the Russian who played the lead in *Strogoff*, plays

opposite *Mary* in *Surrender*. I like his acting. The European tendency towards heroics is missing from his mannerisms, and he plays his part with sincerity and conviction. He impresses me as being a valuable addition to our ranks of actors. One performance in *Surrender* that greatly pleases me is that of *Nigel de Brulier*. It pleases me not only because it is a splendid characterization of a Jewish Rabbi, but because it presents a good opportunity to a fine old trouper to demonstrate to the young people of the screen just what acting is. We have many fine actors in Hollywood and I always am glad to find one of them in a role that gives him a chance to display his art. *De Brulier's* performance in *Surrender* is one of the features of the production. The direction of *Ted Sloman* is an example of what can be produced by sticking to motion picture conventions. I can find fault with no individual scene. The production is an elaborate one and mechanically the picture is perfect. Each scene is presented as we have grown used to expecting it to be. The book is a powerful presentation of the persecution of the Jews in Galicia, and *Edward Montagne* and *Sloman* made a satisfactory screen story out of it, but they stuck to accepted screen traditions. The picture seems to lack a soul. I have tried to fathom its weakness, but have not been successful. It has one big dramatic punch, the drama being sustained throughout a long sequence that is directed splendidly. *Lea* goes to a Russian prince. The sacrifice of her purity is the ransom price for the lives of her townspeople. It is a powerful situation and its transition into a love scene between the two is natural and compelling. It is the only part of the picture that stirred my emotions. The story is one that should have had a strong appeal, and the number of tears that I have shed in projection rooms prove that audiences and music are not necessary to awaken emotional reaction in me, but at no time during the unfolding of this picture in the Universal projection room did its inherent pathos move me. The constant irritation of poor punctuation in the titles may have had something to do with it. I was conscious, however, that I was looking at some fine photography for which *Gilbert Warrenton* was responsible and which made the picture an artistic delight. There were many notable examples of grouping and lighting which resulted in pictures with a *Rembrandt* quality. *Surrender* was produced under the supervision of *Paul Kohner*. It is a good picture, but might have been a great one.

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On the Importance of the Little Things

LOVERS is the kind of picture that you see quite often on the screen. There is no excuse for its being as poor as it is. It has everything. The theme is a strong one—gossip forcing the wife of one man into the arms of another. The screen story of *Douglas Furber* and *Sylvia Thalberg* develops the theme in an entirely satisfactory manner. The production is a sumptuous one, every reel presenting a series of beautiful pictures. The cast is particularly strong. *Ramon Novarro*, *Alice Terry* and *Edward Martindel* play the leading parts, and the minor roles are in the hands of such very fine actors as *Edward Connelly*, *John Miljan*, *Holmes Herbert*, *George K. Arthur* and *Roy d' Arcy*. Story, production and cast are the big things that enter into a picture. All of them

being entirely satisfactory in *Lovers* we can not blame its lack of merit on their absence. This brings us to the conclusion that the picture's weakness may be attributed to the manner in which the little things were handled. Anything that harms a picture, however, can not be a little thing, which brings us to another conclusion fraught with importance to the makers of motion pictures—that there is no such thing as a little thing in any picture. Everything is big. One so-called little thing in a picture will weaken it but slightly; a lot of such things will ruin it. They ruined *Lovers*. People have laughed at me because of my persistency in advocating the proper punctuation of titles, the laughers protesting that it is such a small thing to occupy so much space. One man writes me a kidding letter about the importance I attached to Ray Hatton wearing his hat in a woman's boudoir; another asks me to forget close-ups and take up something of more importance. One example of one of these little things in a picture would not harm it greatly, but put all of them in one picture, and repeat them with aggravating persistency, and they offset all the virtue of story, cast and production. The utmost ignorance is reflected in punctuation of the titles in *Lovers*, and there are scores of idiotic close-ups. There is no snap in the telling of the story, the characters dragging their way through it with a lassitude that becomes annoying to view. I believe this is the first John Stahl picture I have reviewed since I began *The Spectator*, and can not recall anything else of his that I have seen, but am convinced that his reputation is based on better work than he shows in *Lovers*. Apparently to his direction and the editing is attributable the weakness of the picture. Many scenes that would have been quite dramatic if shown in shots comprehensive enough to include all the characters enacting them were chopped into close-ups that destroyed the unity of the groups, the unity being the dramatic factors that were the excuses for the scenes. But the picture is not entirely without virtue. Far from it. Miss Terry, Novarro, and Martindel give excellent performances. I do not fancy male pulchritude to an extent that influences my estimate of the acting of those who possess it, but I must confess that I derive considerable pleasure from merely looking at Novarro. He certainly is a handsome youngster, but his looks are not his only asset. He can act. He does very well in *Lovers*, but wait until you see him in *Old Heidelberg*. I might say something about the looks of my old friend Ed Martindel, but I do not wish to make him vain. He has reached the dangerous age, and you never can tell how dangerously vanity might express itself. But he, too, can act. I would like to see him on

the screen much oftener. Many scenes in *Lovers* are directed effectively, but not enough of them to make it a good picture.

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Louis Wolheim As a Comedian

JOHN W. Considine Jr. did a daring bit of casting when he assigned Louis Wolheim to carry one of the leading parts through seven reels of comedy. Wolheim has been one of our most ferocious villains in the pictures in which I have seen him. The contour of his nose—he will have to pardon the personal reference, for it has been one of his assets as a heavy—makes his countenance more adaptable to the expression of ignoble emotions than to those of tenderness or romance. What prompted Johnnie Considine to cast him as a comedian I do not know, but I do know that it was a brilliant stroke. Wolheim is simply immense in *Two Arabian Knights* which was produced by Howard Hughes and Considine for United Artists release. He is a splendid actor and the externals that made him a satisfactory villain play their part in revealing him as a capital comedian. His team-mate in this picture is William Boyd, the big fellow with a most engaging smile, good looks and considerable ability as an actor. The two of them give us the best war comedy that I have seen. *Two Arabian Knights* steers shy of all the absolute rot that characterized *Behind the Front* and *Tin Hats*. Wolheim and Boyd are presented as two ordinary American doughboys in full possession of their senses, and everything they do might be done by sane people. The fun, therefore, is honest fun. At no place in the film is slapstick resorted to and we are not called on to laugh at absurdities. A notable feature of this comedy is the richness of its investiture. It has an elaborate and artistic production, quite the equal of those we look for in our ambitious romantic dramas. W. Cameron Menzies has given us another series of his beautiful settings and the cameraman has photographed them in a way that brings out all their beauty. Lewis Milestone's direction is inspired at times and never is without merit. It is not altogether a director's picture, but Milestone makes it nearly so. The greater length of the picture deals with the tribulations of the two soldiers after they escape from a German prison camp. The events leading up to their capture and incarceration provide some of the richest comedy in the production, as well as some of the finest direction and photography. There is one remarkable shot showing a ring of German bayonets around the rim of a shell hole in the bottom of which the two American soldiers are settling with their fists the traditional animosity that exists between a sergeant and a private, the conviction of the two of them that they can not escape alive being the private's excuse for the liberty he takes. There is a touch of sentiment in the scene showing the inception of the friendship of the two, which is the theme of the story. The beautiful Mary Astor is the girl in the picture and she acquits herself quite creditably, although I could not help thinking that she and Bill Boyd are not exactly the types that should play opposite one another. In the greater part of the film her face is veiled, only her eyes showing, but with them alone she plays beautifully and effectively her share of her first love scene with Boyd. There are many clever gags in *Two Arabian Knights* that

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are going to be greeted with hilarious laughter when the picture reaches the public. John W. Considine Jr. supervised the production and is to be congratulated upon giving us one of the best produced and most diverting comedies of the season. I quite agree with Mike Levee who assured me in low but emphatic tones that the picture is in the can. *Two Arabian Knights* will be a successful comedy, and I hope Considine will give us a lot more with as much real merit.

Carl Laemmle Jr. Makes His Debut

CARL Laemmle Jr. has supervised his first feature length picture. His supervision makes the picture important. Some day this young chap is going to be a power in pictures, the extent of his power being the extent of his ability to apply it. He is interesting on account of being the first of the second generation of picture people. The personal affairs of the motion picture personnel occupy none of my attention and I am not a reliable authority on such matters, but I believe that Carl Laemmle is the only really big man in screen circles who has a son old enough to occupy an executive position in a studio. Junior is Carl's only son, by virtue of which he becomes an interesting figure. Some day the fates of many picture people will rest in his hands and it is important to know if he gives promise of proving equal to the big job that some day will be his. When I heard that he was supervising a feature, I did some snooping for you, my aim being to discover if he really were supervising or only thought he was, or not even that. I found out that he was on the job sure enough. He is the only boy old enough to shave who was born in pictures, and I congratulate his father on the fact that the son is enamored of them. He has picture sense. He backed me successively into nearly all the corners of the Universal lot and made me listen while he told me the things they were going to put into his first big picture, displaying an enthusiasm that needs only ability to make it a potent factor. And judging by the picture, *Too Many Women*, he has the ability. Of course I do not discount Bill Beaudine's direction, but I am quite sure that he will concede that Junior is one of the things somewhat rare in pictures, a supervisor who helps. *Too Many Women* is a rather frothy thing, containing a whole lot of entertainment. One thing I liked about it is that it is absolutely clean. There

is not a suggestive foot of film in it, thus showing that Junior is off to a good start. Lois Moran and Norman Kerry play the leadings roles, and their romance is told delightfully. In course of the romance some real comedy is developed, and when the picture is released it is going to be responsible for a lot of laughter. Beaudine directs with his usual sympathy. He has a marked ability for taking a sequence that has little story value in it and making it entertaining. He also possesses a keen sense of humor, more marked in this picture than in any other of his that I can recall. It's a far cry from *Sparrows* to *Too Many Women*, and only a talented director could do so well with two pictures which differ so greatly. Lois Moran gives a delightful performance. She has a few opportunities to shed tears, and is as convincing as usual in the pathetic scenes, but her whole role is happier than any other that I have seen her in of late, and in the happy scenes she is as lively and sweet as one could wish. Norman Kerry has a role that fits him admirably, that of a rich man-about-town, strongly susceptible to the charms of a multitude of women until he meets the right one, in the quest of whom he concentrates all the fervor he formerly had scattered so widely. Lee Moran provides much entertaining comedy. A refreshing departure in the picture is the absence of explanatory titles introducing Lois and Norman. We are not told who they are and it makes no difference. We see them, and that is enough. If Junior Laemmle never supervises a poorer picture than *Too Many Women* he is going to be all right.

Samuel Bischoff's Latest Dog Opus

SAM BISCHOFF makes no bones about the fact that he reads *The Spectator* and that he puts into his pictures a lot of the things that I say should be in them. This puts me up against it. If I roast one of Sam's pictures it would be an acknowledgement that my advice is bad. Some weeks ago, before I knew that I was an unconscious collaborator in the making of his pictures, I saw Sam's *The Snarl of Hate*, a picture in which Johnnie Walker shared honors with *Silverstreak*, a dog. I extolled it for its naturalness and humanness, and advocated the inclusion of more heart interest in dog pictures. I have seen another in which the same stars appear. Johnnie, of course, is the same capable actor we know him to be, but the dog shows great improvement. He has become quite an actor. This picture, *Where Trails Begin*, is good enough to be shown anywhere. Noel Mason Smith has given it the same sensible direction that he gave *The Snarl of Hate*. There is nothing ridiculous in it, something that I never was able to say about any Rin Tin Tin picture I have seen. The human appeal that I maintain should be in dog pictures is in this one. *Silverstreak* is shown as an outlaw with a wife and family. The family is composed of three jolly pups that win the heart of anyone. One shot showing them having a tug-of-war with a chunk of meat is the best piece of comedy relief I have seen for a long time. The villain shoots the mother of the puppies, and thereafter *Silverstreak's* one object in life is to get revenge. This gives the picture some point. Everything that the dog does is convincing and appears to be a thing that a dog would do. Both the Bischoff pictures that I have seen have the same merit, which reflects

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credit on the direction of Smith. We sympathize with the dog's motive in pursuing the villain more deeply than we would if he were engaged in assisting to apprehend a criminal who had committed a breach of a man-made law, as all other dogs I have seen in pictures have been. His care of his mate and her pups has real appeal. The story of Ben Allah is a straightforward one and its development is interesting. Smith does not make his human characters detract from the story by over-acting. Walker gives a very good performance. He is a fine type of young American and I would like to see him in more pictures. Hughie Mack contributes a lot to this picture. He is very fat, architecturally an asset for a comedian, but he possesses also a keen comedy sense and is an excellent actor. His comedy is not dragged into the picture by the scruff of its neck, but has its part in the telling of the story. Charlotte Stevens is entirely satisfactory as the girl. Sam Bischoff apparently approves of my arguments in favor of the correct punctuation of titles. Those in this picture are punctuated flawlessly. I find in them something else that I have advocated—a poetic quality when the scenes they introduce warrant it. There is some magnificent photography in this little picture. There are dozens of snow scenes that possess great beauty. All in all, *Where Trails Begin* is a dog picture that can teach other producers a lot about how such pictures should be produced.

* * *

"Bitter Apples" Is a Bitter Dose

WHEN the ship in which Monte Blue and Myrna Loy cruise around the world in *Bitter Apples* is wrecked it carries to its watery grave a secret process for the preservation of flowers which would be worth millions to Kathleen Clifford. As the boat is crossing the equator its main salon is dolled up for the wedding of Monte and Myrna. Flowers are everywhere, chrysanthemums, gladioli and other varieties that flitted by too rapidly for me to spot them. The bride carries a beautiful bouquet of roses, the bridesmaids carry roses and forget-me-nots, and Monte wears a carnation in his button-hole. All the flowers are so fresh that it is hard to believe that they were transported a few thousand miles to catch up with the ship in time for the wedding. The ship had a bar that was unlike any bar that I ever saw at sea, and I have seen the bar on each ship I have traveled on. This one stood out as they once did in American saloons, and the bottles stood in orderly rows behind it. The ship is wrecked, passengers and crew are thrown every which way, but the bottles are not disturbed in the slightest, demonstrating that being full of liquor has its good points. Monte and Myrna are left alone on the great ship and the next time we see them their clothes are in tatters, demonstrating that having nothing to do on a luxuriously furnished ocean liner is awfully hard on wearing apparel. At the time of the wreck Monte is in evening clothes. After the time lapse we see him in linen trousers, but still wearing his dress coat. How did he lose his dress trousers? What happened to his shirt? If he could find a pair of linen trousers why couldn't he find a shirt that wasn't in tatters? Monte dines in the main salon of the ship. It is a great place and one candle in a whiskey bottle illuminates it brilliantly without casting shadows.



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Monte wanders into another part of the ship and carries the candle with him. Every cabin he enters is all lit up before he arrives and the candle makes no difference in the lighting. Myrna does even better. She prepares a meal in the galley without even a candle, having to rely solely on the bright light that envelopes the whole place. During a love scene between the two there is a title which says, "During the night a mysterious ship comes alongside," then the love scene goes ahead and we don't see the mysterious ship coming alongside. I expected to see another title cut into it giving the latest quotation on Julian Pete. The mysterious ship is a pirate craft, despite the fact that there aren't any any more, and although they have an abandoned liner to plunder, the pirates remain on it only a few minutes and carry off only a few silver ornaments. The next morning a United States coast patrol cutter, absent-mindedly slithering around in the vicinity of the equator, a few thousand miles farther from home than such a cutter ever went before, rescues Monte and Myrna when they are having a terrific fight with a lot of fearfully rude pirates. I have enumerated only a few of the features of Bitter Apples that made it a picture which fascinated me. The wreck is very well done, but the story is just as tattered as Monte's shirt. I may have seen a more ridiculous picture some time or other, but I don't think so. Even if the story had any sense in it, which it has not, the awful technical direction would have ruined it. If all the mistakes were forced on Harry Hoyt, who directed it, it will be all right with me if he shoots up the Warner Brothers studio. He ought to do something about it.

* * *

"Chinese Parrot" Is Not Leni's Best

PAUL LENI has not made as good a picture out of The Chinese Parrot as he did out of The Cat and the Canary. He has used weird shots until they lose their effectiveness by their frequency. Every shot in a picture should be presented as someone sees it, either the audience or some character or characters. In The Parrot he shoots a cabaret dance platform from immediately above it, without planting anyone clinging to the ceiling to look down upon it. Sojin enters a room in which there are half a dozen people. We see at first an indistinct glow which dissolves into Sojin. This is mere trickery. Sojin might have appeared that way to someone with a bun on, but as all the people he is approaching are quite sober I can see no excuse for the weirdness. There is no place in a picture for a photographic stunt that is included solely on account of its status as a stunt. There are some very effective dissolves showing a Chinese New Year celebration, and such shots are used legitimately, for they portray vividly the mood of the celebration. A striking example of this, perhaps the best I ever saw, was the manner in which Lubitsch showed the artists' ball in So This Is Paris! If we are to judge Leni by his two American-made pictures we are to give him high rank as an artist in photography and lighting. There is not a shot in The Parrot that is not a delight to the eye. He composes and lights his scenes superbly, and his cameraman invests them with a velvety richness that makes them magnificent examples of screen art. When I reviewed The Cat I complained that Leni did not allow his people

to act. He does not commit that sin in his second picture. In it he does not even stop at making them act. He makes them over-act. Sojin is the hero by virtue of the importance of his part, and gives an amazingly clever performance, displaying an astonishing array of facial expressions, but is made to exaggerate extravagantly his impersonation of a waiter. Albert Conti gives a very convincing performance as the main heavy, but even when alone in a long corridor he slinks along the wall in a manner that would make him no less conspicuous even if there were somebody around. Hobart Bosworth plays a dual role with his usual sincerity, and Ed Kennedy is quite a delightful roughneck. Marian Nixon is the girl and Edmund Burns the young fellow who is in love with her. Neither has much to do, but does what there is to do all right. J. Grubb Alexander and Edward Montagne were responsible for the story, and I think they might have turned out a better one. There is nothing in it that grips the audience. While I have criticized Leni's direction as contributing to the picture's weakness, I must, at the same time, give him the credit for all its merits, for it by no means is without merit. He has given a cheap and ordinary crook melodrama an artistic presentation, and makes its appeal to the eye atone greatly for its lack of appeal to the intellect. His first picture gave me a good opinion of him as a director, and his second does little to disturb it. He is more the artist than the storyteller, but perhaps when he gets a better story than he had this time he will give us a better picture. Anything he does is worth looking at, and that is something.

* * *

Pictures Cut to One Pattern

THE Spectator has ten readers to-day to every one it had on August seven last year. In the issue of that date there was a discussion of motion picture executives. There has been a considerable demand for the number, as the article seemed to have created some interest. For some months there have been no copies on hand with which to fill the demand. I have received several requests to reprint the article in order to give it the benefit of the increased circulation that The Spectator now has, and I comply with the requests herewith. It was in four paragraphs, concluding with the one bearing the heading, "I Don't Like It, Their Battle Cry." The first paragraph

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follows: Literature is entertaining in the degree that it reflects the contrasting thoughts and personalities of those who write it. The stage charms us because it presents a wide range of different treatments of the standard plots, because it expresses as many minds as there are dramatists. All the arts have prospered solely because they have not been dominated by one mind or a set standard. No one says of literature that it has grown monotonous; no one says that this or that is "typical literary stuff." Nor is a similar charge brought against the spoken stage. There is no "typical stage stuff." Literature and the drama have existed for centuries without becoming monotonous. The screen is the newest of the arts. It came upon the scene at a time when the world had reached its highest stage of intellectual development, when mental expression was enjoying its greatest freedom from traditional domination, bigotry and legal restraint. It offered to creative minds a new and amazing method of expression, so simple in its application and so unlimited in its possibilities that if it had been given an unhampered opportunity it would have captured instantly the thinking people of the universe, and to-day would be the greatest art. But despite its youth we hear every day of "typical movie stuff." The poor infant has accumulated moss already! Have the minds that kept literature free from this taint become standardized suddenly? Have dramatists abruptly become afflicted with paralysis of their creative faculties? There is no similarity between the novels of Ibanez, Conrad, Galsworthy, Elinor Glyn, Curwood, Grey, Roche, Arlen and Tarkington, but pictures made from the novels are monotonously alike, are just "typical movie stuff." They do not find the favor with the public that they should, because the public likes variety. The same writers who gave it books it likes, give it pictures that tire it. And yet pictures are made to be sold to the public and prosper to the extent that they can be sold.

* * *

Pictures Are Not Made for Public

THE chief weakness of the whole moving picture structure is that pictures are not made for the public, that they are made for Irving Thalberg, B. P. Schulberg, John McCormick, Jack Warner, Harry Rapf, Hector Turnbull, John W. Considine, Jr., William Sistrom, Benny Fineman, Henry Hennigson, Sol Wurtzel, and the rest of the production executives. These men, and others both here and in the East, take upon themselves the interpretation of the mind of the public. "I don't like it," is the final word on any suggestion made in connection with a picture. Writers and directors have given up trying to please the public; their sole aim is to please the men I have mentioned. Authors who have become rich and famous because they have acquired the knack of pleasing the public, come out here and go back home because they can not please Irving Thalberg. The writers who produce a story for Paramount and the director who makes it into a picture would waste the time they spent in considering what the public would like. Their one mission is to turn out a work that Ben Schulberg will like. Now, it may be that no fault whatever can be found with this method of making pictures; it may be that Irving and Ben know exactly what the public wants and that when either says "I don't like it," he really means that the public

would not like it. Perhaps it is the same with Harry Rapf, Johnnie Considine and the rest. Each of them may be able to do what no other man in the history of the world has been able thus far to do, to determine in advance what the public will like. As a group, they may possess this uncanny wisdom, which was denied man until there came into existence a new race of mental giants known as motion picture executives, to none except whom has this supernatural power been given. Granting that these men know their onions makes a mystery of the search for those who are responsible for the fact that the public yawns at pictures and talks about "typical movie stuff." We can't blame the writers, for what they write of their own free will never reaches the screen; we can't blame the directors, for Sol Wurtzel's or John McCormick's "I don't like it" shuts the gate on their initiative. The people to blame for a sustained flaw in a product are they who control its output. Executives select the stories, approve the continuity, name the director, fill the roles, view the rushes, pass on the cutting and revise the titles. What we see on the screen is the residue of the "I don't like it" reduction. Many poor pictures are made in Hollywood. Those I have named, and a few others, control the output of Hollywood's motion picture factories. A system which produces a poor product needs changing.

* * *

Limited Mentally by Minds of Executives

HAD one group dictated to the Dutch painters, Dutch pictures would have been alike. From the time of Huybecht down to the modern exponents of the Flemish school, it would make little difference whose works you would choose. The colors of Van Dyck, Rubens, Frans Hals, Rembrandt and Van Ruysdael would have been mixed according to formula; their brushes would have been controlled by hands other than theirs, and the wide range of their expression would have been reduced to just "typical Dutch stuff." The screen can develop its Rubens and its Rembrandts if the shackles are removed from the screen art; it can have its Shakespeares and its Shaws when production supervisors throw open the gate. The industry is big enough and rich enough to employ the brains of

ALFRED HUSTWICK

FILM EDITOR AND
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the world, but under the present system it can not express itself mentally beyond the mental capacity of those who control its output. It suffers to-day from the lack of utilization of the brains within its ranks. "I don't like it" is its ultimate limit. The pictures that Irving Thalberg supervises reflect the things he likes. That most of them have been brilliant successes is no reason why they should go on forever as an expression of his likes and dislikes. He might get indigestion. And there always is the possibility that someone with whom he comes in contact may have an idea that he does not like, but which would be received pleasantly by the public. The "I don't like it" system is a menace to pictures, an absolute bar to its progress. For one thing, the public does not care a continental what Jack Warner or Hector Turnbull likes or dislikes; and for another, there are on the lots where these men have power several people whose backgrounds equip them to be better judges of the public taste. These people can not use their knowledge, for it is not the public taste that they are to consider. If they wish to hold their jobs their ideas must conform to the likes and dislikes of their employers. The public be damned!

* * *

"I Don't Like It," Their Battle Cry

WE MUST have production supervisors. I would not abolish the present group if I could, for they are very agreeable chaps whom it is a pleasure to know. They are capable—brilliantly capable, most of them. I share Louis Mayer's enthusiasm for his staff; congratulate Jesse Lasky upon his wisdom in selecting such a genius as Ben Schulberg to supervise Western production; think Joseph Schenck is fortunate in having such an able lieutenant as my friend, Johnnie Considine—and so on, down the line. As supervisors I admire them, as much as as individuals I like them. It is as self-constituted custodians of the world's taste in entertainment that I quarrel with them. They have proclaimed themselves dictators and with "I don't like it" emblazoned on their shields, are riding rough shod over the brains of the world, crushing inspiration beneath arrogant hoofs and dimming genius with the dust they make. They are keeping out of pictures the mental giants they might enlist and molding what creative brains they now control to conform to their own conceptions of the public taste. People will forget "typical movie stuff" if executives will remember that there will be diversity in pictures when diversified brains are employed in their making, when the product of a given unit ceases to reflect only the personal tastes of its head. The head, of course, must control the unit, must have the final decision on all matters pertaining to a given picture. I have no criticism to make of the power he possesses. It is his mental attitude that I quarrel with, his assumption that this position outweighs another's experience in deciding what makes good screen material. A noted author, who gained his fame by gauging accurately the public taste, writes a story for the screen and an executive, who never created one idea that went forth for public consumption, tells him the public will not like it. Perhaps the public wouldn't, but I maintain that the author's experience makes him the better judge and that the executive's mission is occasionally to let another judgment prevail and confine himself to

directing the course of the other's idea until it reaches the screen. At least he might try it until the public stops yawning.

* * *

In Captain Salvation Sam de Grasse commands Lars Hanson to approach him. Hanson hesitates. De Grasse sternly repeats the command and shows that he will not tolerate a refusal. He is domineering, inflexible. The scene is presented in a medium shot in which Sam's back is towards the camera. We do not see his face, but in his rigid form and in the compelling gesture of his arm we get the full force of the scene. The manner of shooting keeps Hanson in the shot, enabling us to see past De Grasse and note the reaction of Hanson to the command. It is one of the best bits of direction that John S. Robertson did in the picture. The majority of directors would have weakened the scene with a succession of close-ups of the two men. Producers complain that they can not get stories with drama in them. If they allowed directors to shoot scenes in a way that would accentuate the drama they would find that there is a lot of it lurking in almost every script. Close-ups, not authors, are to blame for the scarcity of real drama on the screen.

* * *

If picture producers would study Eddie Peabody's popularity they would learn something that they could apply to their films. Peabody appeals to the public because he is absolutely clean. There is not the slightest hint at anything suggestive on any of his programs. He attracts the kind of people who stick. Gene Morgan is just the opposite. He goes as far as he dare towards smut, consequently his popularity is not to be compared with Peabody's. Every time I am forced to sit through one of Morgan's acts I feel that he is about to say, "I could tell you a really dirty one if I could get away with it."



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ARMCHAIR ADVENTURES

By EDGUMB PINCHON

WHAT is an artist? And what is a highbrow? The question is pertinent to me because recently I received a letter hailing me as both in the same breath! And this by a lady with brains enough to do better!

As to what constitutes the artist I shall attempt a definition of my own. The human organism is really an instrument capable of the most beautiful and varied response to impressions. Where this response is correct, keen, delicate and deep you have artistic possibility. Where there is also the urge and power to express this responsiveness to impression in palpable form, word or tone or clay, there you have the artist in full flower.

In this view we can easily see why it is that the artist is always the "giver", in a world of "getters". And why he will labor ridiculously for the smallest success in transmitting his impressions into form. There is no virtue in the fact. He is made that way. He cares for nothing but that the truth be made flesh and walk the earth—the truth which is the tenuous response of his own organism to the miracle of creation.

The high-brow, on the contrary, is one whose brain is active, but whose organism as a whole is dull and unresponsive. And so when he approaches pen, brush, chisel or keyboard he is forced by this fact to become an impostor. He can transmit truly nothing; for his dull unresponsiveness of nerve tissue gives him nothing to transmit. His activity, therefore, becomes divorced from the palpant reality of the actual world, and soon is found to be nothing but an effort to obtain a tinsel reputation for superiority among the dull.

To which of these two types I approximate I shall leave my fair correspondent to judge. But in order that she may come to a correct decision I feel that she ought to have at least the advantage of a clear definition of terms. So that when she says "artist" and when she says "high-brow" she will know just what she means to convey. I know there are a great many good folks abroad who have no word in their limited vocabularies to indicate a thought beyond their customary measure other than the lazy epithet "high-brow". But these do not read "The Armchair Adventures" and I suppose we shall

have to leave them where they are for the present.

* * *

It was pondering somewhat in this fashion that I found myself the other day entering the offices of a large commercial organization. The vivid black-eyed little person who took my card, glanced at it with a quick smile, passed it to her chum at the switchboard, and then flashed at me, "You are not the one who writes in The Film Spectator, are you?" When I admitted the charge the two girls promptly hugged each other with delight and neither could wait for the other to tell me the story.

It seems that riding home on the street car the little person with the amazing black eyes had been reading aloud to her companion a recent review of mine. Several nearby passengers began to "listen in". Others joined them and soon a discussion started which presently produced something in the nature of a riot!

These lively young persons said they followed keenly everything I wrote. Acquittal complete! I felt that if I could create this kind of reaction among little stenographers and switchboard girls and plain folk who ride on street cars, I could well afford to be content, and let those cry "high-brow" who will.

Enough!

* * *

Comes a new novel, The Old Countess, from the popular pen which wrote Tante and The Little French Girl. There is no doubt that Anne Douglas Sedgwick has a myriad feminine fans; and I am very sure that back of her book I should find, were I to meet her, a very gracious and charming personality of a type now passing away. And having said that, I fain would hurry on before I let my tea-cup manners swamp me.

Pale mauve erotic sentimentality, a beautiful, brutal, Byronic young man, a sweet English girl all ideals and renunciations, hands that are always "silver", water that endlessly "rip-

ples", preciousness, adolescent reverie of the 'teens, a lady-like avoidance of every issue, and a facile meaningless style to match! Such is the Old Countess. Is it possible that the women of America do not yet know that since yesterday a stark, beautiful new world has been born that is death to such twaddle as this? But the publishers put it in gold covers. It is a best seller. Let it pass!

* * *

Happy Honore Willsie Morrow to have made such a book as Forever Free, to have taken Abraham Lincoln out of his bloody shroud and set him down at meat with us, yarning, chucking, darning socks, playing with his boys and dogs and between whiles steering these States through the rocks and shoals of imminent disaster!

The art of this book baffles criticism. To say that it is an honest, vivid, accurate reconstruction of the most critical period in American history, the first two years of Lincoln's administration, is to give but a meagre idea of it. Thus to blend historical accuracy with the skill of the novelist is to achieve a triumph in a form of literature which is rapidly assuming an important place. Records, biographies, diaries, these do not live and walk abroad until the breath of the creative imagination has blown upon them. Good it were if history could thus be written and taught. To have read Forever Free, one feels, is to have lived for two years in poignant intimacy with the most significant figure in modern history.

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it admits us to the secret of Lincoln's greatness. As we watch him bowing before his good wife's outbursts and gathering her into his arms afterwards, imperturbably and with gentlest unconcern absorbing the insults of the daily press, the half-concealed sneers of his cabinet, the brutal impudence of General McClellan—it begins to dawn upon us why this man walked with open eyes amid the blind, and moved with the force of implacable destiny when his hour came. He was a man without ego. That was all.

His first cabinet meeting taught him how little of wisdom he could expect from his own supporters. It was a display of all the passions of the unrealized ego. Vanity, ambition, envy, jealousy, prejudice, frothed and foamed, effectually clouding every eye to the work in hand. And Lincoln deliberately let them display themselves in their true light. He passed no judgment, expressed no resentment. He must know clearly just what he had to deal with in these men. That was all. They insulted him. It was of no importance. There was nothing in him that could be insulted. Seward sought to belittle him; but retreated baffled before his lack of amour propre. A myth, a god, almost has become this man who wanted nothing for himself but the satisfaction of a job well done.

Nor in this was there any lack of dignity or spirit. McClellan could insult Lincoln all he pleased without remark. But when he undertook to affront the high office which Lincoln served he found himself rebuked with the prompt and impersonal decisiveness of a master dealing with a brawling schoolboy. And when the moment came for great decisions, when, in fact, in the selfless mind of this man the true path of American destiny had become clear, his will was adamant and his action a sabre-stroke. Then the little puffy sirs all about him whom he loved and humored and forbore, must willy-nilly toe the line and come sharply to attention in the presence of that which he himself served before all things—the need of a people in travail.

A private view of Lincoln during his first two years in the White House is all the book vouchsafes us. Would it were more! And it is the Lincoln in grey wool socks, felt slippers and old dressing gown, poring over Hallecks' Strategy or chortling over Artemus Ward, that we see. And the portrait commingles without a break with the Lincoln who leisurely tested every man in his cabinet, cannily gathered information against the momentous days ahead, brooded and wrestled through the long hours of many a night until, sure of his course, and having broken the haughty and dilatory McClellan across his knee, he struck the mighty blow of the Proclamation of Emancipation, and decided then and there the destiny not only of America but of the whole modern world.

From My Seat In The Theatre

By ELISE DUFOUR

GREATNESS is always simple. Actors composed of mannerisms and affectations on the stage are people of no substance in private life.

Constance Collier, on the contrary, so sincere and expressive in her acting, is one of the most real women in London. To chat with her by a grate fire in her characteristic apartment in York House is to find her open-minded, well-informed and inspiring. That popular young actress, Katherine Kornell, is entirely devoid of strange accent of voice or of insincerity of manner. I sat next to her in a box at The Theatre Guild and during our conversations I thought how very few modern young women in public life could compete with this unspoiled young artist for depth and beauty of quality. I found the same sincerity in Kathleen MacDonnell when I visited her dressing-room during a performance of *The Dancers*. She stood still dressed as "Delphine"; her expressive face lit with real interest in what I was saying and entirely forgetful of her own importance.

It has been three years now since I've had the pleasure of such contacts with the stage in either London or New York, but New York comes to California and so I've again had a pleasant hour with a consummate artist who is first of all a real and delightful human being.

* * *

Otis Skinner met me at the Biltmore with that simple richness that can come only from having lived long and well. There never has been a trick in this tried actor's beautiful performances. Working on the premise, as he expresses it, that "simplicity and honesty are the basis of all true living and sincere art", Mr. Skinner represents the best that the American stage has contributed to the art of acting. Although he has been before the public for many years and with a range from Hamlet to Petruccio, from Prince Otto to Kismet, on through many various plays and parts to *The Honor of the Family*, his present vehicle, he never can be labeled "old school", and this because his art

is expressionistic rather than impressionistic.

Impressionism reflects the time, the caprice of fashion—but expressionism is concerned with the changeless human emotions, the same to-day as in Babylon and Rome. And thus the years have taken nothing from Mr. Skinner's acting, but on the contrary have brought to his performance a humanness that is much beloved.

* * *

I asked him how the motion picture is affecting the stage; and like all actors he said: "For the moment, unfortunately. The cinema is the amusement of the laboring man whose day it is, since he makes the money, while the man who works with his brain goes poor. The working man wants amusement without strain either on his brain or his emotions."

"The crowd," Mr. Skinner observed, "leaving a movie house has a listless gait and dull silence, in sharp contrast to the brisk animation of the audience that pours from the theatre. Even when the play is bad and indifferently acted the audience is com-

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pelled to feel and to carry that feeling into the street and home."

Then Mr. Skinner's dark eyes opened wide in mock seriousness. "Do you know who are the best actors in the movies?" He made an eloquent gesture to mark his point—

"Babies and geese! And remember, dogs draw some of the largest salaries."

* * *

Then he answered my question.

"The main requisite in the photoplay is that the situation should do the acting and the player keep a placid face, no matter what is happening." He gave as an example John Gilbert in *The Big Parade*.

Mr. Skinner has not escaped the experience of the silver sheet which he admits was most interesting, "much like seeing one's self in a mirror." His colorful production of *Kismet* was filmed "to the music of a great organ." His expressive face flashed me a whimsical smile as he said, "Of course, you know no one could endure a motion picture without the support of music.

He found it difficult to act with only the director and the camera men for audience, for Mr. Skinner says the theatre is made up of both audience and player, each having a distinct role. He told an amusing story of the actress who played the part of his abused daughter in *Kismet*; how the director tried "to make her feel bad" to the accompaniment of the great organ and his dramatic recital of the awful things her father had done to her! But she only sat dull-eyed under this external application of histrionic poultice and simply could not break out "into feeling bad". At last she buried her face in her hands and cried, "Play Kiss Me Again", and through such stimulus she managed to squeeze out a few tears over a placid face.

"So you see," Mr. Skinner concluded, "all this is quite new for an actor and entirely contrary to the requirements for success on the stage.

* * *

Then we spoke about the practical side of the matter. In making the long run from coast to coast one-night stands are quite necessary to meet expenses. The theatres are all engaged with films and the interruption of such with added expense of stage hands is not practical. However, there are people in these small places who demand a play occasionally. The photoplay has not yet entirely destroyed the public taste for "the

spoken drama," he said, and laughed softly as he used that ill-advised label for his chosen profession. He thinks the art of the theatre will never be destroyed, even in America, by the film industry; and that in Europe it will be much less affected.

Delightfully he described a performance of *The Taming of the Shrew* that he saw last summer in Elsinore, Denmark. It was played with spirit, vitality and beauty. Famous himself as *Petruchio*, he found a rare pleasure in Johann Polsen's brilliant performance, even though ignorant of the Danish language.

When he is in Paris Mr. Skinner goes often to "La Comedie Francaise," if for nothing but to study method. Here also he saw a performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but it was artificial and without roots, he said.

Next season Minnie Maddern Fiske, Margaret Anglin and Otis Skinner are

going to play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Mr. Skinner made a gesture to indicate the rotundity of Falstaff, "I shall be 'way out here," he laughed.

For the Honor of the Family is playing for two weeks at The Playhouse, and Mr. Skinner says he has a good company.

KARLE KARPE

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VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

FROM TOLEDO, OHIO

Dear Mr. Beaton:

De Mille may not have created a masterpiece when he produced *The Yankee Clipper*, but here is one customer who feels he received his money's worth. That beatific state of mind, however, was not induced by any excellencies of acting or direction, but by the dramatic use made of "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," the theme song of the picture, a composition which was written by an actor for a benefit performance in 1843, and which so appealed to our British cousins that they appropriated and sang it as "Britannia, the Gem of the Ocean". Consequently, it is often listed as an old English air, even so distinguished a musician as Sousa attributing it to this source. While the picture was weak and did not build up to a strong climax, the music seemed to carry it along, and to one familiar with the words and possessed of a fair amount of sentiment, it could not fail to thrill.

I think if I were an extra, yearning to set the world on fire, I would try to apply the torch in a picture like *The Yankee Clipper*, for when one begins yawning over the work of the principals, what is supposed to be background speedily catches the eye and marches to the front. In this picture, for instance, the work of the extra playing the stowaway was so noticeable that I stayed on and saw the picture a second time. Such utter helplessness, such blinking bewilderment and mute resignation one seldom sees projected on the screen, and I gained the impression that it was the young man's first appearance before the camera, and that he really was confused. His name was not given, but he strongly resembled Forrest James, the mountaineer boy in *Stark Love*, if, indeed, as I suspect, he is not Forrest James himself.

While I am not an authority on court etiquette, the scene in which Queen Victoria appeared seemed to me very naive and unsophisticated. Do queens discuss matters of commerce and state while sitting on a throne? The council chamber would seem to be a more appropriate place for such occasions.

But despite its many faults, I liked *The Yankee Clipper*, if for no other reason than the excellent acting of Junior Coghlan. I recently saw this young man in *Slide, Kelly, Slide*, and was deeply impressed by the way in which the scenes between him and William Haines were played. They were absolutely natural and true to life, and lent to the picture that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. Junior has a long way to travel, however, before he can equal the work of Philippe de Lacy. Philippe may not be a genius, but if not, he approaches it so closely that most of us can not distinguish the difference. I often wonder why De Mille has never used as picture material the

story of the Taj Mahal, the "jeweled tomb" of Agra, India. Here is romance fit for the hand of a master, and of such irresistible appeal that Time can not erase it from the memory of men.

F. B.

A LETTER FROM ENGLAND

Dear Sir:

Do let me say how much I enjoy *The Film Spectator*, and how very heartily I appreciate your anti-close-up campaign and demand for the use of common sense and natural good feeling in directing incidents in pictures. Your example of Vera Lewis stepping over the dog—or, rather, not stepping over it—in *The Music Master* exactly detects what is wrong with nearly all films, and "Explaining the Literary Touch" develops it still further. There can not really be any reason why script writers and directors should not make film characters behave like human beings: except that it rarely occurs to them. And unless they do, the films will remain as unconvincing and shallow as mostly they now are.

I naturally can't help wishing, however that a slightly clearer idea of the British film situation were grasped in the States. It isn't, as your paper seems to feel, that agitators for more British films are trying to force unpopular British films on the public in place of popular American ones. Good British films are terribly popular in England. For instance *Mademoiselle from Armentieres* has broken records and stretched the walls of cinemas all over the country; and before that *Mons* did.

Only about twenty-five films get produced here every year; they are under-financed because the market is so small. A good many of them are almost entirely lacking in point or interest. In fact, a quantity of British

films are as bad as the worst American films. You can imagine, however, that out of twenty-five films a year, none of them costing much, the chances of getting more than three or four good films is very small. The amount of experience offered to new talent is also small.

It isn't at all that anyone wants to stop good American films coming here; in fact, every paper has said we want and must have the best American films. But most of us long for the day when this country will produce a film as good as, say, *Variety*, and as English as that was German. We wish *Beau Geste* had been made here, too.

Your remedy for solving the British film problem is a great one. I only wish we could adopt it. But, honestly, with the picture theatres booked up blind years ahead with American outputs, and only about three thousand-odd picture theatres, so that the best films can only at most hope to

Somebody gets a break here. Instead of writing a story for George Jessel, I am writing one for Miss May McAvoy. Incidentally, "The Heart of Maryland" is going to be better than "White Flannels."

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get about fifteen hundred bookings, isn't it at least a solution, however clumsy, to reserve a space in every conema here for a small percentage of British films, gradually increase the percentage, try to get an outlet in the States for the best British films, and then see?

IRIS PORTER.

Bloomsbury, London, England.

DOING IT PROPERLY

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Isn't there some way that we of the motion picture industry can show the world that we are grateful for our supreme heaven-sent knowledge of how to make things dramatic and universally interesting? It is platitudinous to say that no one ever has come within a mile of us in solving the complexities of mass imagination, mass entertainment, mass likes and dislikes. We all know that we have that market absolutely cornered. (Do excuse my insistence on delving into the glaringly obvious.) But, being aristocrats, it would become us, I think, to be generous about the thing and instruct those of the plebscite—explorers, pirates, baseball players, jazz slayers, bathing beauties, professional daredevils, for instance—who cause little or no flurry in the public imagination, in a few of the finer points of showmanship which Providence has placed squarely under our thumbs. Can't we show them that we aren't pigs about what we know and what they don't?

Now look at this Lindbergh flight. If only one of our producers had taken hold of it and staged the thing properly, think how the public might have been made to thrill at it! They let that brave chap fly the Atlantic as though he were taking a Sunday morning walk home from church. Any movie producer could have shown them how and why they got off the path of drama at the very start.

He would have pointed out to the promoters that when a young aviator comes to them with plans for the realization of a long-cherished ambition to perform a great, unprecedented feat it is bad histrionics to say simply, "All right, go ahead. We've got faith in you. We'll back you." An imposing meeting of bankers and luncheon club presidents sitting at a mahogany convention table should be called, the producer would have explained; flags should be draped around and the entrance of the enterprising fellow ought to incite reporters to write,

"Lindbergh, determination not unmingled with self-consciousness in his face and bearing, halted inside the great doors, then came across the highly-polished floor to make his first progress in an expedition which has been in his heart since boyhood."

"That's how we put on scenes in our studios," Mr. X, producer, would have told them. "And see how the public likes it! They don't want this sample, drab stuff. It don't thrill them."

And I think it was a crime to let Lindbergh hop off from San Diego unexpectedly; so that it was impossible for a big scene to take place, with crowds swarming all over the field, and men excitedly chewing feathers on women's hats, and fat women, in the jam, stepping on their squashed husbands' corns, for comedy relief. No wonder the public wasn't very gripped by news of the take-off.

And then when he had reached Paris after thirty-one hours of sleeplessness, his mother was no more awake to the drama of it than to get herself quoted as saying, "All I hope is that they let him sleep." If Mr. X had been at her side we can depend on it that he never would have let such trite humanness escape from her lips. In all properness, she would have been schooled to cry, "My country and my boy! Oh, I am so proud of them both!" That has sweep to it. What

she did say, unfortunately, was not appealing, not mother-like, as the producer himself would have shown; and therefore, on such a potentially dramatic occasion, not correct.

Lord! When I think of how the whole world might have been lifted off its feet by the exciting drama of what Lindbergh did if the affair had been sponsored by our industry in accordance with its own infallible orthodoxy, I almost weep for the lost glories of it. Can't The Spectator use its influence to disseminate in the unfortunate outside world the solid dramatic principles on which almost every one of our splendid program pictures are built?

HENRY GRATTAN.

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FILM SPECTATOR

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The artistic emancipation of pictures will be brought about only by their financial reformation — see page 4.

IN THIS NUMBER

SOME REMARKS ON HOW THEY MAKE THEM

The amazing inefficiency of the production staffs of the big organizations is responsible for an annual loss of millions of dollars that should go to the stockholders of the companies. When executives learn how to make pictures economically they will make them artistically.

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CREATIVE PATHS OF THE CINEMA

A valuable contribution to screen Discussion written by Dr. Alexander Arkatov, formerly Professor of Fine Arts at Moscow University and Dean of the Motion Picture Academy of Moscow, an authority who writes with conviction upon various phases of the making of pictures.

No insane thing that the industry has done is half so insane as the belief it holds that it can not do better — see page 6.

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is back from New York, but it doesn't seem to have relieved me of the necessity of filling his space. He's a funny old egg.

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THINK about motion pictures.*

HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 25, 1927

Why It Pays Less Than Two Per Cent

LAST year the capital invested in motion pictures earned less than two per cent.—to be exact, one and nine-tenths per cent. I congratulate those who control the industry. I don't understand how they allowed the one and nine-tenths to get away from them, but getting that close to absorbing all the returns requires an ingenuity in extravagance that I did not know they possessed. This year perhaps they will do better. It will be necessary only to start a few more pictures without properly prepared scripts, to keep a few more featured players and directors drawing salaries without working, and to shelve a half dozen or more completed productions. and the score will be perfect; there will not be even one and nine-tenths per cent. for those who hold the outstanding stock. It will serve the stockholders right. As long as invested capital is supine enough to submit to the manhandling it gets from the captains of the motion picture industry, just so long does it deserve to do without dividends. If the people who conduct the picture making end of the business had half the brains that the magnitude of the funds they handle would indicate they should have, the profits of the producing organizations would be enormous. No farce ever filmed is half so ridiculous as the film business itself. M.-G.-M. started *The Mysterious Island*, spent at least half a million dollars on it, and then abandoned it because it found out that it had no story to start with. The papers tell us that the same organization made a picture from *Bellamy, the Magnificent*, which was so lacking in merit that it was shelved, Paramount purchasing the right to produce the story. And the same organization started *Anna Karenina*, spent an enormous sum on it, scrapped everything it had done, and started over again. I suppose these three examples of the rank incompetence of the organization were re-

sponsible for the loss of one million dollars to the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer stockholders. That's two per cent. on fifty million dollars. No doubt Will Hays and other spokesmen will endeavor to earn sympathy for the industry as a whole because it earned less than two per cent. on its invested capital, yet in these three specific instances alone we find one of the units of the industry throwing away enough money to pay two per cent. on fifty million of this capital. And that is only a part of the money wasted annually by this organization. And what it wastes is only a part of the enormous wastage of all the producing organizations combined. The ignorance and indifference of those who control picture making in Hollywood are robbing the holders of motion picture securities of enough money to pay them handsome dividends. Louis B. Mayer can regard with complacency his ignorance of the economics of picture making because he is in a position to regard with satisfaction an apartment building in which he and Harry Rapf are investing one million dollars that pictures paid them. When he totals up the millions he has made out of pictures perhaps Mayer considers that to know more about how they should be made would be ostentatious. Before we indict the motion picture business for earning so little, or ask special favors for it on that account, we should add to the one decimal nine the Mayer-Rapf apartment house, Adolph Zukor's million dollar salary, Jesse Lasky's many millions, and several score Rolls-Royces. If we added all these, and credited earnings with all the money wasted by ignorant management, we would find that pictures, as manufactured articles, pay enormous dividends. But the stockholders do not get it.

* * *

The Money Orgy Can Not Go On

AS LONG as the motion picture industry pays such handsome dividends on mismanagement just so long may we view without compassion its failure to pay dividends on its invested capital. M.-G.-M. stockholders are unreasonable to expect adequate returns on their investments when they pay enormous salaries to men who waste a million dollars in three abortive attempts to

PICTURE MAGIC

"It is a picture with a soul,"
So wrote the critic for the press,
And we who saw the theme unfold,
Not knowing what he meant, said "Yes,"
And nodded wisely while we spoke,
"It has a soul; we felt its contact with our own,
A heightened tone, that we can not express—
As music steals sometimes when all is still;
Some vague, entrancing strain of Worlds or Space or Time
That breathes beyond our normal sense . . . sublime."

"It has a soul." And what is that
Of which we speak so pat, and still can not define?
That sense-enthraling thing, more strong than bands of
steel
To hold us in our seats lest we may miss
Some magic essence on the screen
That feeds some need within and makes us feel
That we are, perhaps, a part with the Great Universal
Heart
That throbs serene, though empires fall.

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

make motion pictures. Please do not get the impression that I consider Metro's the only incompetent organization. I just happened to hit upon it as an example. None of the big producing organizations is conducted in a manner that suggests business sanity. Those with ability to make pictures efficiently have not the authority to exercise it. When efficiency steps into the business our present executives will step out, because there will not be room for both. Then picture dividends will bound upwards, and the most grossly extravagant epoch in the industrial history of the United States will be at an end. And this time is not far off. Pictures are due for a shake-up. The reign of incompetency is about over, for those whose money is in the business are beginning to ask questions of one another. The East is pricking up its ears. I happen to be in a position to know that this is true. The Literary Digest has reprinted several articles from The Spectator and some of the financial papers of the East have quoted references I have made to the economic side of the business. Following the reproduction of each of the articles inquiries have been received from banks, bond houses and individuals not connected with pictures. The most frequent request is for sample copies of The Spectator and practically each copy sent out brings in a year's subscription. One mail brought in thirty-six subscriptions from Boston and its suburbs. I do not flatter myself that Eastern financial houses and individuals who have big business interests wish to know what I think about The King of Kings or Bitter Apples. I know that they desire to read anything available that relates to pictures as an investment. It is for them that I am writing these paragraphs. I want them to know that millions of dollars rightfully belonging to them are being sacrificed to the most ignorant management that a great industry ever was cursed with. I hope that some day they will realize this and insist upon a reform in the business in which they have invested. I am not endeavoring to kick up a fuss merely for the fun of watching it seethe. In fact, I am not interested in the financial side of pictures. I am interested in their artistic progress. But I realize that their artistic emancipation will be brought about only by their financial reformation. Those who conduct the business now plead that it is like no other, that the rules applying to other businesses do not apply to it. In this they are wrong. There is no basic difference between the manufacture of a motion picture and the manufacture of a pair of shoes. Common sense can be applied to the making of each. It is applied to shoes because those who make them have regard for the interests of those who own stock in the companies which employ them; it is not applied to pictures because those who make them do not care a damn for the stockholders in the picture companies. The operating heads of the companies pay themselves enormous salaries and give more thought to holding their jobs than to meriting them. They resist any suggestion of reform. As long as they can grow fat on incompetency they are content with it. They are indifferent to their own ignorance because it pays them tremendous dividends. They know nothing about making pictures and will not listen to those who do. They think that the screen is a mystery to which they hold the key. They claim that waste is an inherent part of the business; yet there is no more reason for it in motion pictures than there is in building hotels.

They Say Film Is Quite Cheap

WHEN Hugh Beaton planned the Roosevelt Hotel he saw that every cubby-hole that was to be in it had its place in his blueprints. The contractor was given a perfect set of plans and he built according to the plans. When one of our big producers plans a picture he disregards every rule of common sense. He has no idea how much footage his script calls for, which is as ridiculous as it would be for Hugh Beaton to start building his hotel without having any idea how many rooms there would be in it. The producer offers as an excuse that "the cheapest thing on the lot is film," which has as much sense in it as there would be in a statement by Colonel Beaton that there is nothing as cheap as bathrooms, meaning that it would be good sense to provide a lot of them and tear out a few dozen after the plumbing had been installed. The producer will view with complacency the litter that covers a cutting-room floor and tell you that it cost but a few cents a foot. If he had brains enough to conduct his business properly, he would know that every foot of that film cost him from thirty-five dollars upwards per foot, depending on the cost of the production. Every foot of film that Paramount exposed for Old Ironsides and De Mille exposed for The King of Kings cost many hundreds of dollars. It is not just film that lies on the floor; it is a fortune spent on sets, salaries, and lights. Last week I saw in four pictures long sequences that will be eliminated before the pictures will be released. Two of them will be eliminated at my suggestion, for I could not see that they had any story value. Two were cafe sequences, one showed a crowded street and the fourth a dance hall. The smallest had possibly eighty people in it and the largest at least three hundred. Three great sets were built for the interior scenes and a special street was constructed for the exterior. Every foot of film used in photographing these four sequences remains on the cutting-room floor after the pictures are released. And the people who made the pictures will tell you that this film cost but a few cents a foot! The worst feature of it is the complacency with which the heads of the organizations that made the pictures view this waste. They accept it as a matter of course and with not one-tenth as much concern as Hugh Beaton would display if his plumbing contractor told him that one of the hand basins in one of the hundreds of bathrooms was going to be scrapped. Beaton would argue, and argue rightly, that there was no excuse for the loss of the few dollars, for the contractor never should have installed the superfluous basin. He would make the contractor stand the loss, which would be in accord with ordinary business procedure. But picture people have a different way of doing business. If they were going to build a hotel they would tell you, to start with, that hotel building is unlike any other building, and that ordinary common sense could not be applied to it. They would have a hazy idea that they wanted about four hundred bathrooms; then they would build a thousand or so and pick out the four hundred that they fancied most. This is not an extravagant comparison. My Eastern readers may rest assured that everyone in Hollywood could tell them that I am not exaggerating in the slightest. Producers and directors really believe that the only way to

make a seven-reel picture is to shoot one in anywhere from fourteen of several more reels, and cut the seven out of the miles of film. Von Stroheim shoots anywhere from twenty to thirty feet to every one that he can use, and we rate him as one of our greatest directors. If the builders of the Roosevelt Hotel erected fifty stories and pared them down to the twelve that constitute the finished structure all the world would stand aghast. The same thing is done in Hollywood every day and we applaud the people who do it.

* * *

Some Day Will Be Much Better

HERE never has been, and there never will be, any excuse for erecting a set which subsequently is not shown on the screen. Nor is there any excuse for shooting a hundred feet of any actor and showing but ten feet of him on the screen. There is no excuse for taking a long shot, a medium shot and a close-up of the same scene. There is no excuse for taking any scene that does not appear in the finished picture. All these extravagances for which I contend there is no excuse enter into the making of every picture produced in Hollywood. That is the way we make them, because we never have mastered the proper method of making them. In fact, the industry has not learned yet what a motion picture is. It thinks it is something akin to a stage play. It thinks it can assign an idea for a story and a collection of actors to a director and get a picture. It can. That is the way it gets its pictures now, and that is the reason they cost so much more than they should, the reason the great majority of them are mere trivial rot. The actual making of a motion picture, the shooting, cutting and titling, should be the simplest features of its production, easy things done efficiently. If the picture is to be released in seven reels there should not be more than seven hundred feet of excess footage when it is cut to its final form. I am aware that this statement will be received with loud laughter by executives and directors, loud laughter that bespeaks vacant minds. "How can we do it?" they will demand. They can't. I never even intimated that they could. No system is efficient of itself. It must be applied efficiently by people who understand it. Such people some day will be making our pictures. They will be people who understand that the business of the screen is the very simple one of telling stories, not of producing plays. They will take all the time they need to prepare their stories. They will know the story value of every scene and just the number of feet of film each scene will consume. The first draft of each story will contain all the things that now eat up the stockholders' millions—the unused sets and superfluous scenes. But the extravagances that remain on the cutting-room floor to-day will be eliminated from the script to-morrow. When the script is turned over to the director it will be a perfect picture on paper, and it will be a simple matter for the director to transfer it perfectly to the screen. It will be so perfect that it will be inspiration-proof, and there will not be more than ten per cent. excess footage when shooting ends. I do not mean that each perfect picture will be a success. Many books perfectly written and many plays perfectly constructed fail to catch the fancy of the public. That is a hazard of the business. The people who control production now are under the in-

sane impression that the present weird method of making pictures can not be improved. There is not one of them who will not tell you that waste can not be eradicated. I say it can, and to prove it all I need do is to take the doubter over to "poverty row" and show him some instances of pictures being made as I say they should be made. The little fellows make them that way because they have not enough money to make them as the big fellows do. The big producing organizations are money drunk. When they sober up they will have some regard for their stockholders, and this regard will manifest itself in story preparation. They could reform to-day if they wished to reform. But the debauch will continue because the debauchees have deluded the stockholders into the belief that it is a normal condition. But it will not continue much longer. Money is not in the habit of indulging in prolonged naps.

* * *

How Not to Make a Motion Picture

THE artistic emancipation of the screen waits upon its economic reformation, for perfect examples of screen art can be produced only by following perfect scripts. I have told you that two ensemble scenes were eliminated from pictures on my suggestion. No scene that belongs in a picture can be cut out of it without harming the picture. I advocated the elimination of the scenes because their elimination would harm the pictures less than their retention would harm them. If the stories for the pictures had been prepared properly the fact that these scenes were not needed would have become apparent at some stage of the development of the continuity. They would have been eliminated then, thus saving many thousands of dollars to the stockholders of the producing companies. But the much more important thing, the thing I am interested in, is that the pictures would have been better ones if the scripts had not contained anything that later had to be cut. Producers tell us that the only way to make a picture is to shoot everything that might get a place in it and then build the story in the cutting-room. That is exactly the way a motion picture should not be made. It is a crazy system both artistically and economically. The place to build a story is in the script. To support this argument I refer you to the great majority of pictures that are made the other way. They bear witness to the fact that the manner in which they are made must be wrong. "You must not curb our inspirations," cry the directors. Well, we are not curbing them now, and see what we get. Of course we get some good ones, perhaps one out of each fifty, for some stories have the inherent strength to rise above the manhandling they receive. The King of Kings is a good example of the standard method of making pictures. When shooting was completed I am told that there were something like sixty reels of story. When it was cut for release there was no story. It is advertised as a picture that cost over two million dollars to make. What the public sees probably cost less than a fifth of that amount. The rest is absolute and unwarranted waste, an economic folly that produced an artistic failure. I see by the papers that the De Mille organization announces that it will make four more pictures at a total cost of ten million dollars. Always money! If it be true, it is a crazy adventure. If the organization has its four stories, which I doubt, how

does it know it will cost that much to make them into pictures? Henry Ford announces a new car which he says he will manufacture as inexpensively as possible. De Mille announces new pictures which he says he will manufacture as extravagantly as possible. The extravagance is the only recommendation which his press agents give them. All Hollywood knows that even if De Mille did spend the ten million dollars, not more than two millions of it will reach the screen, and that the chances are that we will get four very indifferent pictures. If he would take his four stories, forget all about money, prepare them thoroughly and shoot only what will appear on the screen, he would save eight of his ten millions and give us better pictures. Too much money has harmed more pictures than too little money has. If only half a million dollars, instead of over two millions, had been spent on Old Ironsides we would have been given a better picture than we got. This "shoot anything" policy because there is money enough to pay for it, is the most glaring manifestation of the utter imbecility of the motion picture industry. "Perfect scripts" should be the policy. Producers and directors will tell you that we never can have perfect scripts. No insane thing that the industry has done is half so insane as the idea it holds that it can not do better. Perfect plans from which to make pictures are no more impossible than perfect plans from which to build bridges.

* * *

Writers Should Blow Off the Lid

WHEN it is recognized that making motion pictures is the business of writers there will be a vast increase in the number of meritorious pictures. No other organizations on earth had as many able writers on its pay-roll as M.-G.-M. has had for the past year. Yet not one of these writers had any authority on the lot. At any given time at least half of them were loafing because the production heads did not know how to use them. The organization holds the view that directors are the big people on the lot. The result of the adherence to such belief is a succession of pictures so lacking in ordinary sense that the shelves are being crowded, and desperate efforts are being made to put other productions into shape for release, in the hope that they will return the money spent on them. If Metro had thought more about its writers and less about its directors it would not have so many failures on its hands. If it had understood what kind of business it is in it would have started a long time ago to nurse writers along until they were producing scripts that anyone could direct. But it has ignored the writers. The crowning insult came a few weeks ago when the writers were herded into a projection-room and soundly roasted by Irving Thalberg and Harry Rapf for not doing better work. Both Thalberg and Rapf were fair enough to say that part of the blame was theirs because they could not find time to direct properly the assignments of writers. All the blame is theirs. If they were competent executives they would be organized so that they could realize a profit on every dollar their company pays in salaries. That is what executives are for. The competent executive hires only men who can do their jobs better than he could, a principle that is in the A B C's of business. But it is a principle that is not recognized in the motion

picture business. There is not an executive in any studio in Hollywood who does not believe that he knows more than any author on earth does about story values. Authors should be the big men of the industry, should be getting the big money. If they were not a lot of silly asses such would be their status. Not because I am interested in them, but because I am interested in better pictures, I would suggest that as the heads of the industry hold writers in such small regard, they should be given an opportunity to see how they could get along without any. United into a solid organization screen writers would have the industry at their mercy. They could wipe out all the insults they have suffered and make themselves rich. The weapon is at hand. The Authors' League and the league of dramatists—I don't know the name of the organization—are in a position to-day to dictate to the producers of stage plays, holding their power securely because they exercise it wisely. It would be a simple matter to extend the activities of these organizations to embrace the work of those who write for the screen. Those who are sincere in their desire to follow screen writing as a career should be receptive to such a move. Surely they have stood all they intend to from those who now rule their destinies. If they should join forces with those who write for the stage they would be inaugurating a movement of importance to all the world, for all the world goes to the cinema and is interested in any step that will improve the quality of the entertainment provided for it. Capturing the industry would not be purely a piratical exploit on the part of the writers. They could lick their chops and have a devil of a lot of fun in making their raid, but they could solace any consciences that might be among them with the thought that they would be launching the greatest movement for its uplift that the screen has experienced.

* * *

"Service for Ladies" Is All to the Good

A DELIGHTFUL picture is *Service for Ladies*, Adolphe Menjou's latest, not yet released. It introduces a new director in the person of Harry d'Arrast, and a charming new leading woman in the person of Catharine Carver, a beautiful girl with an alluring screen personality. D'Arrast is the director who got the goats of everyone connected with the picture, from Ben Schulberg down, by wandering onto the set anywhere from one to three hours after everybody else was ready to go to work, and wandering off it before anybody else was ready to quit. It was his first picture and there was a feeling on the lot that he might have been a bit more humble about it. But for all his eccentricities he's made good and given Paramount one of the best pictures it has had to release in a long time. It presents Adolphe as a headwaiter, and I was glad to see that he makes a much better headwaiter than he did a barber in another picture a year or so ago. He gives a capital performance. I always have liked him, but never quite as much as I do in *Service for Ladies*. The story deals with a man as humble as a maitre d' hotel falling in love with the daughter of an American railroad king. As a matter of fact, maitres d' hotel are not humble. No king is quite so aristocratic as the man who snaps his fingers at the waiters who serve the royal table. "You must come from quite a family

of chefs," I remarked to the maitre d' hotel of the Cecil Hotel in London, after he had told me that his grandfather had made the first ice and served it to Napoleon. "Sir," he responded, with extraordinary dignity, "I come from a dynasty of chefs!" Such a maitre d' hotel is Adolphe in this picture. However, the social gap between the waiter and the American princess is good story material and Ernest Vajda and Benjamin Glazer have written a decidedly clever story with it for a theme, and Chandler Sprague prepared it most acceptably for the screen. Awed, perhaps, by the superb independence of the director, George Marion Jr. was subdued into writing quite ordinary titles, which are exactly the kind the picture should have. D' Arrast's direction is splendid. He shows the best of taste all the way through and makes the foreign atmosphere convincing. I think he overdoes the activities of the waiters in his Parisian restaurant, not quite catching the restfulness and lack of bustle you find over there, but it is a small matter, and perhaps D' Arrast and I have not patronized the same Parisian restaurants. That perfect acting that gives no evidence of being acting, characterizes the whole picture. Paramount has given it a very fine production, the scenes showing winter sports in the mountains of Switzerland being particularly effective. A very creditable performance is given by Lawrence Grant, who plays the part of a king who is one of the maitre d' hotel's patrons. He is incognito in all his scenes, but shining through his democracy there is always a suggestion of his kingly dignity. It is a delightful characterization. James Marcus is another artist who scores heavily. Nickolas Soussanin appears in but one scene and again impressed me with his ability as an actor. I have seen him on the screen but three times, have never seen him off it, and don't know who he is or where he came from, but I am willing to go on record as holding the opinion that he is a truly great screen actor. Some day some producer will have sense enough to give him a smashing big part and he will prove to be another big box office bet. Miss Carver is new to me, as I can not remember having seen her on the screen before. She combines an air of refinement with a sense of humor and naturalness and is a valuable addition to that very small circle of our screen girls who are convincing in sophisticated parts.

* * *

Problem of How to End the Story

THE story of *Service for Ladies* is interesting and intriguing. Albert, the maitre d' hotel, does not allow Elizabeth, the wealthy American girl, to learn that he is a waiter. He follows her to Switzerland and there encounters the king, who treats him as affably as cosmopolitans always treat their favorite waiters. Albert is planted as being the greatest maitre d' hotel in Europe, and there is nothing unkindly in the royal cordiality. The girl witnesses the friendly relations that exist between the waiter and the king and naturally assumes that the former must be a person of social distinction. But there is no evidence that she falls in love with him on that account. She merely is a charming American girl, not a tuft-hunter. The king becomes aware of the growing romance, but is too much a sport to give Albert away, and he is too much a king to let the girl be fooled. He

puts Albert in his place in a splendid little scene. On their first meeting the king had given Albert a cigar from his case. In the scene in question the king again produces the case, but takes from it only one cigar, which he puts between his own lips, and demands a light from the waiter. "I think I like you better as a waiter," says the king as he strolls away. This does not deter Albert from proposing, but later it does work into his conscience enough to make him run away from the girl after she has accepted him, and return to his restaurant. When the authors got this far with the story undoubtedly they wrinkled their eyebrows over the problem of how to end it. Would they let the waiter marry the girl, bridging the very wide social gap, or would they end the story as nine times out of ten it would end in real life, by the renunciation of the love? Adolphe plays the waiter so well that we do not forget that he is a waiter, and Miss Carver plays her part so well that we do not forget that she is an American aristocrat. My personal opinion at this stage of the story was that such a girl would not marry a waiter, for their worlds were too far apart, and she would have sense enough to know that such a union held little prospect of being a happy one. But would the great American public like such an ending? That was the studio problem, and it would have been mine if I had been producing the picture. The studio solved it by bringing the girl to Albert's restaurant after the separation and reuniting the lovers, the king being on hand, as principal stockholder in the hotel, to raise Albert to the dignity of managing director. I would have solved it in another way. Albert, strong in his determination to be true to his renunciation, meets the girl and her father at the entrance to the restaurant and escorts them to their table. It is the girl's first knowledge of the status of the man she loves, and makes a dramatic scene. I would have had Albert turn from her table, to be stopped by the king, who would have produced his case and given Albert a cigar. And on that incident I would have faded out. I believe it would have been a more effective ending, and it certainly would have been a logical one. "But," Paramount will say, "we make pictures to make money, and unless they are popular they won't make money. Those who support pictures want to see the lovers united, consequently we make the ending a happy one." But I believe that Paramount bases its argument on a faulty premise. It has a wrong conception of the Great American Shoppirl, whom it strives to please. It thinks she would like to see the heiress marry the waiter. In reality our Shoppirl is our greatest snob. She will want to see the waiter put in his place. The ending of *Service for Ladies* is its weakest point. Of course the so-called "unhappy" ending will be put on the foreign prints, but even in this country I am satisfied that the picture would do better with the logical ending. Certainly it would make a greater appeal to people of intelligence.

* * *

"The Rough Riders" Misses a Big Chance

PARAMOUNT has taken a first rate president and made him the central character of a picture that is second rate entertainment and third rate history. *The Rough Riders* might have been a notable picture. Roosevelt was our most dramatic president, as well as one of

our most revered. If this picture were our only record of him, he would have no place in history. It cheapens him. It takes liberties with him which those who cherish his memory will resent. Hermann Hagedorn is credited with the story. Roosevelt recorded in print his respect and admiration for Hagedorn, and Hagedorn, in his several works dealing with phases of the life of his friend, whose official biographer he became, reveals the affection he had for the dynamic president, whom he treats with dignity and with a true appreciation of his place in American history. I refuse to believe that a man who regards the late president as Hagedorn does could have written the story of *The Rough Riders*. Undoubtedly most of what he wrote rested in that Valhalla of murdered literary inspirations, the cutting-room. Since viewing the picture I can understand why all the Roosevelt organizations and the *Rough Riders* will have none of it. Paramount has repeated what it did with *Old Ironsides*; it has taken a glorious page out of American history and messed it up, achieving nothing, and spoiling it for others who might have proved equal to it. There are some impressive shots in the picture, the one showing a whole regiment of horses beginning to buck at once being one of the most exhilarating scenes I ever saw on the screen; but of the greatness of Roosevelt or the tragedy of war or the drama of the liberation of Cuba there is nothing. Roosevelt's presence in the picture is of value only for what we know of him and not for what he does in it. No moment in a war is as dramatic as the moment when it begins. In this picture it begins in a title and no one who appears on the screen is shown as having anything to do with beginning it, although we have sequences showing what led up to it. The birth of the *Rough Riders* is handled without any appreciation of the drama that might have been injected into it. We are shown a few telegrams and then the assembled battalion springs into view on the screen. I longed for one shot of a lonely cow puncher in North Dakota picking up a paper containing Roosevelt's call to arms—for anything that would have impressed me with the drama of the response to the call as a tribute to the man who made it. Paramount overlooked all such opportunities and gives us a lot of farcical movie characters who make a lark out of a serious moment in our history. The raising of the *Rough Riders* was a tremendous tribute to Roosevelt as well as a highly dramatic episode in the Spanish-American war, but neither the personal element nor the dramatic value was brought out. Nor was the war itself dramatized. It is not a story of the war, for it shows but one incident of it; it is not a story of Roosevelt because it gives a false impression of him; it is not a story of the *Rough Riders* because there are too many other elements in it. In fact, I don't know how to classify it except as just another movie. Let us appraise it from that angle.

* * *

Probably Was Edited to Death

THE *Rough Riders*, as a motion picture, clearly was edited to death. As shown it is a succession of unrelated episodes. It does not possess that continuity of thought that every picture must have to be a credit to screen art. It is elemental in its weaknesses, possessing faults that one would expect the rawest amateurs at

picture-making to avoid. It contains many decidedly clever gags, at which I laughed most heartily, and they appeared with a frequency that makes the picture more of a farce than anything else. Roosevelt seems to be in it chiefly in the capacity of a press agent for it. The gags are unrelated to the story, as is quite allowable in a farce, but which is out of place in a historical drama, which, in theory at least, this picture must be. A funny sequence is that which shows a whole company pursuing Mary Astor. It would have been ten times as funny if it had been handled properly. It received just the standard movie treatment, which means that it never could have occurred in real life. It is cheap farce, and it might have been clever comedy. Charley Farrell's characterization was inconsistent from the first. Undoubtedly the idea of the story was to reflect in him the virtues we look for in our heroes. As we see him he is an ill-bred smart Alec, lacking in all the gentlemanly qualities that the manner of his arrival in camp would indicate he must have possessed. Had he pursued Mary Astor with some degree of subtlety it could have been still funnier and at the same time consistent with his status as a hero. If he had displayed some subtlety in leading his company on the trail of Mary, doing it in a way that would have left her until the last moment ignorant of the fact that she was being pursued by the company, and which would have kept the company from knowing that it was pursuing her, Farrell himself being the sole custodian of the secret, the sequence would have been infinitely richer in comedy value. At least twice too much footage is devoted to Farrell carrying the lamented Charlie Mack to the hospital tent. It loses most of its drama. The picture is blighted with the close-up curse, and the close-ups themselves are not handled intelligently. If we must have individual close-ups of two people standing together, each should not occupy the mathematical center of the screen. There should be some suggestion of the continued presence of the character eliminated by the close-up, such as an arm and shoulder showing. The lighting of most of the close-ups is flat and white, not corresponding with the lighting of the medium shots. There is a scene in which clouds are printed in. It is done unconvincingly, the clouds not matching the lighting of the scene or its mood. Mary Astor's hat is dropped from the carriage in which she is riding with Farrell. She accompanies him when he goes back for it only because Victor Fleming, the director, told her to. It is impossible to conceive of her doing it for any other reason. There is a scene showing a photographer making photos of the soldiers. The style of camera he uses was not manufactured until some years after the

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period of the picture. By long odds the best feature of *The Rough Riders* is the set of titles written by George Marion Jr. They are brilliant. They possess the merit of indulging in wise-cracks without departing from the spirit of the picture. The serious titles have high literary merit and all of them are punctuated properly, which is quite a refreshing departure, although Paramount of late has given us some other examples of the correct use of punctuation marks. It may be just a coincidence that this evidence of reform has been apparent only since *The Spectator* began a campaign against ignorant punctuation.

* * *

Putting in Things That Don't Belong

ART, like beauty, is absolute. It is its own reason for being. If perfect, it can prompt no question that it itself does not answer. Each sequence in a motion picture is a separate artistic creation. It can not be perfect unless it be complete, unless it prompts no question that it itself does not answer. There is a sequence in *The Rough Riders* that does not conform to this elemental rule. It prompts the question, "Why?" and does not answer it. Mary Astor bakes two cakes, one for Farrell, the other for Mack, and promises to take them to the train that is to start the soldiers on their journey from San Antonio to Cuba. A spoken title by the cook at Mary's home plants the fact that Mary is not much of a cake-maker. With her cakes in her arm Mary boards a trolley car, the power goes off and she arrives at the depot too late to deliver the cakes to the two young men. It is a long sequence, there being shots of Mary's journey and of scenes at the depot. There are perhaps a couple of thousand people in the latter scenes. The sequence ends with the train disappearing in the distance and the tearful Mary, the cakes under her arm, watching it disappear. I have no idea why it is in the picture. It does not advance the story, has no particular production value, and there is no acting in it to excuse its presence. It ties up with nothing that comes after it, and appears to me to be nothing but a stupid bit of editing. It is too bad that so much footage must be devoted to a valueless sequence and so much story value left on the cutting-room floor, as undoubtedly was the case with this picture. To the credit of *The Rough Riders* stand several notable performances. I do not approve of Farrell's characterization, but I approve highly of the manner in which he depicts it. I can not conceive of any well-bred young man making himself so obnoxious to an obviously refined girl. He should have sense enough to know that she could not be won that way. In the Cuban sequences Farrell is much better. All the way through the picture he displays the same charming screen personality that makes him so appealing in *Seventh Heaven*. He is equally at home in depicting gaiety and pathos, and should go a long way in motion pictures. George Bancroft is a capital comedian because he is a capable actor. His performance in this picture is in strong contrast to his part of a heavy in *White Gold*, but he handles both characterizations with the same degree of understanding and sincerity. I wish Fleming had toned down Noah Beery's sheriff a little. If he had been less of a low comedy sheriff it would have given Bancroft's comedy more value. The peculiar thing about the performances of Bancroft and Beery is that

while they are outstanding features of the picture they have nothing to do with anything else in it, which is one of the many weaknesses of the picture from the standpoint of story construction. Mary Astor is just the girl for the part she played. I never have seen her look more beautiful, and she backed up her beauty with entirely satisfactory acting. Fleming handled the charge up San Juan hill splendidly, although Roosevelt is shown as having little more to do with it than I had. It was a clever idea to make the inception of the charge the moment when Mack overcomes his cowardice. The way the soldiers sweep into line behind him as he advances recklessly is inspiring. As the picture failed of its status as one of the outstanding productions of all time, it might be a good idea for Paramount to re-edit it. Surely there was enough material shot to make a good picture if it were edited intelligently. It is too bad to see such a fine opportunity missed.

* * *

Excellent Acting In "Small Bachelor"

PERHAPS I would not have been so severe in criticizing American pictures for lacking even performances, as I did in the review of *Aftermath*, if I had known when I wrote it that I was so soon to see one of our own pictures that contained nothing but excellent acting. It is *The Small Bachelor*, directed by William Seiter for Universal. In the cast are Barbara Kent, Andre Beranger, Vera Lewis, Lucien Littlefield, Ned Sparks, Gertrude Astor, William Austin, and George Davis. It is a comedy with a strong bearing towards farce in many scenes, and is one of the brightest, most amusing and entertaining pictures I have seen recently. Bill Seiter, who had so much to do with making Reg Denny popular, is very happy in his treatment of light comedy. He has a deft touch and a lively sense of humor. In this picture he is at his best. I saw it before it was cut finally and in its finished form no doubt it will be lacking in some of the weaknesses that it then contained. The first encounter between Barbara Kent and Beranger, the leads, was shown in close-ups, for which I understand a medium shot has been substituted, as it should be. I have no fault to find with the direction of any of the scenes, nor with the manner in which the story is told. It moves along briskly and I predict that its screening will be accompanied by an almost continuous ripple of merriment. I have named eight members of the cast. Each of them gives a perfect performance, and it is not often that we have eight good performances in one picture. The combination of a fat and

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sympathetic part and Littlefield's ability as an actor gives him the picture. He is delightful as an old man who has never been farther west than the Hudson, but who just dotes on cowboys. Beranger has perhaps the most difficult part, but is equal to it. He is one of our finest actors, literally an artist to his finger-tips, for he has an expressive pair of hands and knows how to use them. Also he is adept at putting over points with only the slightest changes in his facial expression. A scene in which he and Littlefield, both posing as bold westerners, take huge chews of tobacco, is extremely funny. Gertrude Astor never fails to give a satisfactory performance. In this picture she tells Bill Austin that she has three children, that they are thin on account of a lack of proper nourishment, and that she takes in washing, and she tells it all in pantomime, so well done that her meaning is plain. Austin gives another of his clever character delineations, a little gem of a performance that makes a big contribution to the picture. Vera Lewis is capital. It is a relief to see her in a part that is not altogether heavy. It comes as quite a surprise to see her laughing heartily. I don't think that I ever saw Ned Sparks do better than he does in *The Small Bachelor*, and George Davis, familiar in two-reelers, contributes a lot of excellent comedy. Barbara Kent is a young girl with a charming screen personality, and with a little more experience should take her place among our most popular featured players. Tom Reed wrote a very clever set of titles. I believe this picture marks his debut in the capacity of title writer, and it is an auspicious beginning. Other producers should take a leaf out of Universal's book and strive for even productions by casting real actors in all the parts, not in just the leading ones and leaving the others to be played by people who can not give as capable performances as the high-salaried headliners. I am confident *The Small Bachelor* will be highly successful because of the sensible casting combined with intelligent direction.

* * *

"Love of Sunya" Faults Are Basic

ONE does not have to strain himself mentally to decide what is the matter with *The Love of Sunya*, Gloria Swanson's first picture for United Artists. It has two fundamental weaknesses. Most of the action has an air of unreality because it depicts what the principal character sees in a crystal globe, and the love story includes a girl who seriously considers turning her back on the man she loves and marrying another for money. Neither of these features of the story is good screen material. Gloria does some really satisfactory acting in the opera-singer sequence, but we know it is something that did not take place, that her mind is in a trance, and that shortly we will see her in her home again, consequently our sympathy is not aroused by her suffering, for we know that the suffering is not real, that it is something that might be caused by something that we're pretty sure is not going to happen. I'm not much given to crystal-gazing, and have no great confidence in the infallibility of a ball of glass as a prophet, therefore I took no stock in anything that Gloria saw in the one upon which she centered her gaze. Not being interested in the things the crystal told, I was not at all interested in the degree of art Gloria displayed in interpreting them. Cosmo

Hamilton's ponderous titles endeavored to plant some deep thought in connection with the seance, but I refused to accept the profundity of a philosophy that leaned on the gleaming surface of a crystal ball. Then take the love story. On the screen and in our literature the heroine must marry the man she loves. If she hesitate a moment she is not the standard model heroine. Money is a base substitute for love, an ignoble consideration. I am aware that good drama can be built on the girl marrying the wrong man if some powerful reason why she should do so be established, but I refuse to be impressed by a girl in a luxurious home, whose father is still rich enough to throw a big party, taking seriously the father's suggestion that she spurn the man she loves and marry another merely because he has money enough to take up the father's notes at a bank. And I would despise a father who would urge such a sacrifice. Yet the picture asked me to sympathize with such a daughter and such a father. I couldn't do it. Perhaps better treatment would have made the whole thing plausible, but Albert Parker's direction exposed to view all the weaknesses of the story. When someone made *The Eyes of Youth* from the same story some years ago he gave us an infinitely better picture than Parker has given us. When Miss Swanson determined to produce this tricky story as her first United Artists venture she should have secured the services of the director who already had handled it successfully. However, *The Love of Sunya* has a great deal to its credit, chief of which is the really excellent performance of the star. Gloria Swanson is an artist. She is capable of great things, and I do not think she ever will find a role too big for her. I have great respect for her ability and I hope she will be fortunate enough to find stories worthy of it. But I would advise her to keep all freaks out of her entourage. No doubt by the expenditure of a large sum of money she secured Cosmo Hamilton to write the titles for *The Love of Sunya*. He was not content with writing rather ridiculous ones, but apparently he determined to show us goofs just how our language should be presented on the screen. He scorned quotation marks to indicate spoken titles and disregarded all other rules of punctuation. Why Miss Swanson should put this weird load on an already weak story I can not understand. Good titles would have helped the picture. Hamilton's harmed it.

* * *

Elemental Faults In "See You in Jail"

RAY ROCKETT is improving as a supervisor. In *See You in Jail* he gives us a picture that is not so plastered with close-ups that we can't see it. Joe Henabery directed it. His principal weakness is having all the characters in all the scenes facing the camera. All his crowds are one-sided. The character who in real life would be the center of a crowd is the middle man in a straight line, and speaks over his shoulder to those behind him. There is not one natural grouping in the picture. I do not understand how a director can commit repeatedly such a stupid blunder. When characters walk into a scene and turn to face the camera before speaking, the scene loses all the sincerity that intelligent direction would give it. When the directors of a company are urging the president to do something they do not stand behind him. They surround him, and a photograph

of the action would show the backs of some of them. The story of *See You in Jail* is an amusing one, and Gerald Duffy wrote a scenario from which a better picture should have been made. Jack Mulhall impersonates a famous financier who has been arrested for speeding. He is sentenced to jail in place of the man whom he impersonates, and there is an insert of a newspaper story relating that the millionaire is serving time. Jack's photograph illustrates the story. It's a funny thing the public was not acquainted with the famous man sufficiently to recognize that Jack's features did not resemble his. It is a gratuitous error, for there was no reason why the photograph should be in the paper. It is another one of those things that "nobody will notice." There are two inserts of letters written by two different people. The handwriting in both is identical, and it is striking handwriting that would arrest the attention of the most unobservant viewer. All the mistakes are so elemental that it is surprising that they should find their way into a picture produced by such an organization as First National. It would be interesting to know if First National got mad at John McCormick because he permitted such blunders, or if he got mad at First National because he could not prevent them. If the person responsible for them is still on the lot, First National should hire some grammar school kid as his assistant to see that there are no more such obvious blunders. One thing, though, that First National deserves credit for in connection with *See You in Jail* is the casting. They surrounded Jack Mulhall with real troupers. Mack Swain and Craufurd Kent give very good performances, and William Orlamond provides a lot of clever comedy. The group that forms Jack's fellow culprits in jail is made up of people who look the parts and also act them convincingly. All their faces are familiar, but Charles Clary is the only one I know. Mulhall keeps up the stride he has attained during the past year. The way he has come on as a light comedian is surprising. Alice Day is a captivating heroine. The titles are responsible for a lot of laughs. It is a picture that permits of humor in its titles and Dwinelle Benthall and Rufus McCosh have injected a lot of it. I refuse to believe that people who can write such clever titles would punctuate them so poorly. Every punctuation crime that could be committed is repeated time and again. Apparently the person who types First National titles for photographing thinks that intelligent punctuation is an affectation. *See You in Jail* could have been a comedy that would have amused everyone, but it is so crowded with little things indicating that a low order of mentality engaged in its making that it is a production that as a whole reflects no credit on the organization responsible for it.

* * *

This Story Is Not Convincing

WHEN King Baggot directed *The Notorious Lady* he was handicapped by an unconvincing story. He could not escape making just a movie out of it. He made it an exceedingly interesting picture from a production standpoint, and Tony Gaudio's fine camera work made it a pictorial treat, but as a piece of screen literature it has little to recommend it. Barbara Bedford visits Lloyd Whitlock's apartment to ask him to cease persecuting her. Lewis Stone, her husband, follows her there.



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Whitlock pulls a gun and in the ensuing struggle is killed. Stone is convicted of murder because the jury does not believe Barbara's version of the shooting. That is the main premise of the story, the thing that must be convincing to give the story any value and to lend interest to the ensuing action. Barbara and Stone are the only surviving witnesses of the struggle. Stone is discovered with the gun in his hand, the dead body at his feet. It is Whitlock's gun. It should not have been difficult to establish that fact in court. If the jury did not believe Barbara's testimony to the effect that her husband was innocent, whose testimony did they believe in finding him guilty? There were no other witnesses. The verdict is illogical, damning the whole picture at the outset. It was necessary to the story that Stone should be found guilty at his first trial, but the screen has no license to let that fact substitute for probability in finding him guilty. All we see of the trial is the court room just before the jury enters, and the reading of the verdict. Baggot handles the sequence splendidly, building up the suspense in a compelling way. But he falls down when the verdict is read. I never yet have been found guilty of murder, but I imagine that if I were I would get an awful jolt. In my newspaper days I reported many murder trials and the defendant's reaction to a verdict of guilty always was the high point of my story. Stone does not react at all. If I had been directing the scene I would have made his face acquaint the audience with the purport of the verdict. Later in the picture Stone causes a report to reach his friends that he is dead. Barbara visits the hamlet in South Africa where he is living. She thinks he is dead and he does not know that she is on the same continent with him. Baggot teases his audience by repeatedly having the two almost discover one another, but not doing it until much farther along in the picture. It is too obvious and is unconvincing. Ann Rork loves Stone, but when she quite conveniently overhears a plot to kill him she refrains from warning him until it is too late to ward off the attack. More movie stuff. In real life the girl would have gone right to him as soon as she knew he was in danger. In the first sequence in the picture there is an example of the lack of relationship between a spoken title and the action, something that is quite common. Barbara tells Whitlock that she despises him, but she is as composed about it as if she were asking him the time. Whatever the script title was, it was something far removed from what Gerald Duffy wrote in the title. We will get perfect titles only when the script titles reach the screen. The close-up curse is virulent in this picture and spoils many scenes. Earl Metcalfe is introduced in a

close-up, smiling urbanely at someone. There are several cuts to him doing it, but it is not established whom he is smiling at, or why. Barbara Bedford gives an excellent performance in *The Notorious Lady*. For a long time she has been one of my favorites. Stone reveals himself as the fine actor we know him to be. Although I found much in the picture to quarrel with, I must admit that I found it interesting.

* * *

Miss Leatrice Joy and Donald Crisp

LEATRICE JOY is quite delightful in *Vanity*. Her part is not one of the so common "look pleasant, please" variety. There is a definite thought behind it. She has to show that she is a vain little fool, and while doing it she must retain the sympathy of the audience. Assisted by the able screen story written by Douglas Doty and the capable direction of Donald Crisp, Miss Joy gives a thoughtful and convincing performance that raises my estimate of her abilities as an actress. The part fits her as neatly as one of the gowns she wears so well. I feel like thanking someone for not adding smoking and cocktail drinking to her list of vices. The story is about vanity, and Crisp did not complicate her characterization by depicting her possessing habits that had nothing to do with the theme. As I see the picture, it is a director's triumph, for it could so easily have been made just another impossible movie. The idea of a nice girl accompanying a rough sea captain aboard his ship rather late at night is ridiculous material for a motion picture, and I'm willing to bet that Donald Crisp wrinkled his brows over the problem of doing it in a way that would make it look reasonable. He succeeds admirably, proving again that you can do anything on the screen if you have brains enough to do it properly. But I have one quarrel with

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Donald. Leatrice has to shoot a goofy cook before she can make her escape from the ship. Of course that is enough to play the devil with any girl's nerves. But this girl is our heroine and we look to her to stand the gaff like a heroine. Donald makes her wobble all over the place while she is on the way to the altar, and act like an almost dead person while she is being married. Apparently no one notices that there is anything the matter with her, which is bad in itself, for the people in such a scene always should react to what is being planted for the benefit of the audience. I would have made her stand up straight and march to the altar like a champion; but first I would have shown her alone in her room, waging a great battle with herself for the composure of her nerves, and winning. This would have made her somewhat heroic in the wedding sequence. A pleasing touch, pleasantly reminiscent of the spirit that prevailed on Armistice Day, is given when Leatrice, who previously had not conceded that servants are human beings, locks arms with the butler and the cook and cuts capers with them when word comes that the war is over. It is one of the several directorial gems that sparkle along the course of the picture. The sets are preposterous. I thought Cecil de Mille had got over his penchant for vulgar opulence; or perhaps this is a new outbreak, terrible boudoirs taking the place of horrible bathrooms. I imagine that the idea back of these sets was that they would feed the vanity of anyone living in them. They would be more apt to drive anyone crazy. Once when Charlie Ray entered the grand splash down stairs—I have no idea what sort of a room it is supposed to be—he must have thought he still was outdoors, for he plays a long love scene with Leatrice without removing his hat. In another love scene with her in which hand-holding has its part, he wears his gloves. It made me wonder if undertakers make love that way. It was a pleasure to see Alan Hale on the screen again. His performance in *Vanity* is a really excellent one. He should subdue his yearnings to be a director and stick to the thing he does better. Ray had little to do in this picture. I suppose all his good scenes remained in the cutting-room. I was appalled to see how fat he looks in a uniform. John Kraff's titles were written well enough, but punctuated with the usual De Mille organization's disregard for education.

* * *

This Story Built on Wrong Premise

A MILLION BID attracted me to a picture house because I wanted to give Michael Curtiz a chance to please me. I did not like his *Third Degree*, which I believe is the first picture he made in this country, as there were so many weird shots in it that in my review I called it a "photographic orgy". He is milder in *A Million Bid*, but was given such a highly ridiculous story that he had no chance to make an entertaining picture. He handles one retrospect effectively. Malcolm McGregor is in a moving train, mentally reviewing his courtship of Dolores Costello. The love scenes are superimposed on the one showing him in the train; and while the former are the more distinct we do not lose sight of the man doing the thinking, his picture remaining as a dim background for the others. Another shot has not so much to recommend it. Warner Oland stands with his back to

a fireplace, his arm stretched out on the mantelpiece. Curtiz uses his arm as the upper frame of a shot of Dolores. To get the shot without having her change her position he would have to tear out the mantelpiece to put the camera in position to shoot under the arm, the opening in the fireplace not figuring in the shot. As neither any character in the scene nor the audience could get such a view of Dolores the shot is merely ridiculous, an inexcusable striving for effect. He might just as well have shot her through a hole in the rug. But there is little in the production for which the director can be criticized adversely. He does rather well, but the story is a woeful thing. Dolores marries Oland and the yacht upon which they sail on their wedding night is wrecked. Oland is believed to be lost. Dolores marries McGregor and has three happy years with him. Oland then turns up, his memory gone, and Malcolm, now a famous brain specialist, operates on him. As the story has it the happiness of Dolores and Malcolm will be ruined forever if he recovers his memory, and they take it big. Anyone with common sense would know that there was nothing to worry about. Any court in any country would annul the previous marriage on the showing that could be made, and Dolores and Malcolm could remarry. The big moment comes when Oland, his memory restored, is moved by the evident happiness of the two and denies that he can remember anything of the past, wobbling out of the scene to escape being in the final fadeout. The young people are deliriously happy, apparently being ignorant of the fact that they never were married legally, Dolores still being married to Oland. The wedding ceremony specifies



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"until death do us part" as the duration of a marriage. It does not terminate when one of the contracting parties forgets about it. A picture based on such a wrong premise can not be convincing, and the viewer's knowledge that it is a silly story nullifies the impression good acting would create. The externals of the wreck scene are handled well enough, although I can not understand how great volumes of water can pour over both the port and the starboard sides of a vessel at the same time. The reaction of the characters to the imminence of death by drowning has no sincerity or drama in it. The captain even indulges in a wisecrack, which takes the prize as comedy relief. To strain for a laugh when every agency should be utilized to retain the tensivity of a scene is a childish departure from good screen technic. Malcolm McGregor's performance appealed to me more than any other in the production, partly because it is the most consistent, but chiefly because he is so easy and natural. This young man is one of the best leading men we have and I would like to see him get his opportunity in more ambitious pictures. My opinion is that there is no company too fast for him to travel in. Jack Jarmuth's titles in *A Million Bid* are punctuated with characteristic Warner Brothers inaccuracy.

* * *

Here's One That's Quite Dreadful

DON'T Tell the Wife is the pleading title of a Warner Brothers picture. I, for one, won't. If I told her about it I never could drag her out to another Warner production. It is perhaps the silliest picture I ever saw. Rex Taylor supplied the story and Paul Stein directed. The director aggravated the author's sins, and the title writer made a large contribution to the general asininity of the whole thing. The story is laid in Paris and reflects the atmosphere of Burbank. There is not the slightest suggestion of Paris in any reel. When I view such a picture I wonder how it is possible for a studio to commit so many blunders that any ten-year-old boy in an audience can spot. Lilyan Tashman is presented as a French girl. A remark she makes to the guard on a train is recorded in English in a title, as, of course, it should be. "Zis is ze only train to Paris," replies the guard. This leads to the presumption that the French girl must have addressed the French guard in English. Why? If she addressed him in their own language, why did he reply in broken English? Huntly Gordon, presented as a wealthy and sophisticated traveler, gives a guest a cigar. The box shows that it is a cheap American brand. I understand that Stein is a foreigner. He should know that the government monopoly of tobacco in France makes the importation of such cigars prohibitive. William Demarest calls on Irene Rich in the evening and wears a very glad business suit. The first thing that any American sojourning in Europe learns is that he must dress every night. This is particularly true of such capitals as London and Paris. Gordon and Miss Tashman start a flirtation. They kiss one another lingeringly in full view of the dancers in a ballroom, Gordon's wife being one of the dancers. Miss Rich (the wife) wishes to make Huntly jealous. She dashes off a note to herself, signing it "Henry" (Demarest). Huntly finds the note and becomes jealous all right, but does not recognize his wife's handwriting.

Lilyan apparently is a wealthy girl living in a luxurious home, but when Huntly calls to take her to a cafe she receives him in her bedroom. While he is there Demarest, her fiancee, calls, and she receives him also in her bedroom, first depositing Huntly in a chest. She does not tell Demarest that she is engaged. She pretends to go to sleep, and he tiptoes out. These are only a part of the utterly impossible scenes I saw in *Don't Tell the Wife*, and as I walked out on it when it was about half over I presume there were many more that I did not see. The story is the blabest sort of variation of the triangle. Even if it had been given any kind of sensible direction it would have been too trivial to be classed as entertainment. There is something sad in the contemplation of the expenditure of all the money that it took to make it. To entice people to pay to see it on the strength of the names in the cast is a cheap swindle. If a mercantile house advertised such shoddy goods as Warner Brothers advertise this silly drivel the law would proceed against it for perpetrating a fraud. Such a picture harms the whole film industry, and for their own protection producers should try to figure out some plan by which productions should be rated, in order that such a one as *Don't Tell the Wife* could be placed at the bottom of the list. Of course I know that no such plan is feasible, but something ought to be done about it. Jack Warner should be ashamed of himself.

* * *

I would like to apply for membership in the Society of Those Who Discovered Janet Gaynor. To qualify I present a sentence from my review of *The Return of Peter Grimm*, which appeared in *The Spectator* of January 8: "I never saw Janet Gaynor before, and do not know what other performances she has to her credit, but if her work in this picture is a fair sample of her wares, she is a young woman who gives promise of developing into something worth while."

* * *

"Variety" predicts that *The King of Kings* will run for one year and a half at Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Let's all make guesses. Mine is that the *De Mille* picture will have a run of not much over six months.

* * *

"Who knows what may be slumbering in the background of time?" thunders Cosmo Hamilton in one of his terrific titles in *The Love of Sunya*. Well, go on. I'll bite. Who?

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CREATIVE PATHS OF THE CINEMA

By DR. ALEXANDER ARKATOV

(The Spectator is happy to avail itself of the opportunity to present to the motion picture industry such a thoughtful study of production problems as the following article which was written by a man who is qualified by experience and ability to discuss the question. Dr. Arkatov formerly was professor of fine arts at the University of Moscow, and dean of the State Motion Picture Academy, also of Moscow. He now is a resident of Hollywood and is a valuable addition to the group of intellectual people who slowly, but surely, are beginning to influence production.)

I.

ALREADY Lessing has remarked: "We have actors, but no actors' art." He referred to the absence in theatrical business of what is fundamentally necessary to every art: firm, unshakable rules, clearly and precisely expressed, on the one hand to guide an actor and ensure his successful progress on the path to perfection, and on the other to give a sure ground for approval or condemnation of the actor.

There are actually no rules. There are certain recommendations, accounted rules, but which are not rules in a strict sense, for they lack what is most important: they do not rest on a law, which in the present case can only be that of nature.

In the actor's art, as in every other, inner impulse, inspiration alone, is not sufficient; it is necessary to be able to obey that inspiration. It is not sufficient to feel; it is necessary to incarnate the feeling. It is not sufficient to experience; it is necessary to be able to display what one has felt.

The actor's art is like all other arts, feeling alone does not suffice. Every art needs its material, no art can be expressed except through the manipulation of material; for if there is no material, the feeling has nothing to contain it. What, indeed, is feeling for, if the body can not express it? Evidently we must not merely feel, but must also know how feelings are expressed. The very deadness of the material in which nature is reproduced conditions the artist's feelings when he goes into life and not out of it.

"You can not get nearer," say to him the marble, the paints, the

bronze, the sounds. And the artist stops—helpless.

"But I will get nearer," says the actor. "I am alive! I, myself, am a part of nature and no limit of approach exists for me." And, indeed, no single art, not even that of the theatre, can approach life so closely as does the cinematograph.

* * *

Not even in the most talented paintings, poetry, or music, can we observe life as we can in cinematography. The cinema alone, in the person of moving man, has not yet shown all it can do along the path emerging from life—in rising above the bounds of actuality. Endowed with the most precious of all the means of expression—movement—it can do all that no other art can accomplish. And the cinema actor, subject like every artist to the law of his material, has to subject to that law the mobile material of his living body. Not only the movements in large dimensions (the entrances and exits, the changes in position of the actors, and in a word all that a director decides at the rehearsals before the piece is shot), but the intimate movements of the man himself, the minutest movements of his body, should be produced by him to the complete banishment of everything accidental and unforeseen.

Movement must, like the matter of every art, submit to law and submit to educational form. Let us consider of what the education of movement consists. It is expressed in two qualities: order and judgment. And for this reason. One sees that the movements of the body, as such, are not an end in themselves, for each movement expresses something, and that is why in the training of movement, judgment must accompany order. Here movement is converted into gesture, and the fundamental question of the actor's art presents itself—the training of gesture.

Unfortunately, among our actors, ridicule is almost always aroused when this is mentioned—to such an

extent is the opinion common among us that the training of gesture is impossible, or even harmful, and that it leads to artificiality. Actors stubbornly rebel against order and law, and, of course, do so on the plea of "inspiration". But, I venture to ask, are the arts, other than scenic, devoid of inspiration? Yet they are all subject to law and order. A violinist is not afraid of losing inspiration because he spends hours in learning to control his fingers. The violin and the movements of his fingers are the means through which the musician expresses himself. His body and his movements are the means by which an actor expresses himself.

* * *

One asks why should an actor disdain, and even fear, such training as that in which the violinist sees the pledge of his mastery? The musician knows that it is only by submission that inspiration can display itself. But for actors, alas, there is no more detested word than "submission". The extollers of "inspiration" and "intuitiveness" do not understand that art combines law and freedom, and that as law by itself does not form art, so freedom in art, by itself, is not merely insufficient, but is even destructive.

Delsarte gives this definition: "The body is an instrument. The actor is the instrumentalist. An instrument

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can not play itself, when it is not played upon it will never by itself begin to play." No, it is not life that has to be taken onto the scene, not "intuitiveness"—but nature with all its possibilities. Life and nature are not one and the same thing; life gives only isolated expressions of that of which nature is capable. The wealth of nature must be cultivated, and we must not be satisfied merely by what life offers. We live poorly, we live but little, we do not live fully, and our scanty powers of expression correspond to our feeble receptivity. But we can do more, and we should do more. And what we can do we shall accomplish not by inspiration but only by training ourselves, that is, by training those means of expression with which nature has so generously endowed us, and which we so ungratefully neglect.

* * *

Now let us see what an average, present-day cinema actor can give, if he does not possess a keen scent for life, nor what is called "intuitiveness". One has to take into account the exceptional conditions of cinema work, in which an actor is almost always deprived of the possibility of preparing his part in advance, but comes to the studio an hour, or sometimes only a few minutes, before the scene is shot. He perhaps begins to act the piece in the middle, or sometimes at the end. Briefly and hurriedly he becomes acquainted with the outline of the scene to be photographed; goes through it once or twice—there in his costume and make-up—and, if you please, he is ready: take him!

Evidently the actor can not quietly consider his feelings and actions while the piece is being photographed. Critical reflections, self-observations, the analysis of his role, and the bringing out of its psychological nuances—the business of creating the role; the business of rehearsal—is work to be done at home. So what is at the actor's disposal is only the external means of depiction—mimicry and gesture. But then it is essential for him to make sure that his movements express what he experiences. The cinema requires special skill in expression; it requires perfection of form; it requires distinctness, compression, and clarity. For it often happens that instinctive movements—even if they come as a result of real feeling—may still prove insufficiently perfect, insufficiently formed, and may not fit in with, or suit, the work that is being produced. And, indeed, what can an actor give in such cases, who is not acquainted with the most elementary rules and laws of his own body—considered as an artistic tool for expression—when the whole elo-

quence, and all the tone of his instrument, are a secret to him?

It is evident, and quite comprehensible, that all his creation, if one may so call it, amounts to a more or less successful improvisation, and thereby he puts a stamp of dilettantism on the whole work.

* * *

How can one speak of profound work, or of an actor's sincere creation?

No, the producer must, once for all, reject the casual service of such actors. The producer must form his own corps of artists, who will create specially for the cinema, who will live in its traditions, in its endeavors, in its joys and in its sorrows. This corps of young people needs, I say, a special school. Not a school of manners, but of the science which would furnish them with the knowledge that would teach them the secrets of nature and make it possible for them to master the forms invested in which their natural endowment could attain its true elevation. In the contrary case, what awaits the cinema is to become a home of ignorance and a school of apedom.

II.

Passing to the question of the director's work and his role in the cinema, we would first of all indicate the manifold functions the director fulfils and the series of problems he has to deal with.

It is known that, beginning with the arrangement of the raw literary material and up to the arrangement of the cutting of the finished picture, all the most important stages of the production of the film are supervised by the director personally and independently. It is comprehensible that such an unusual condition of the director's activity sets him outside any law and beyond any boundary, and the question of a methodical execution of his designs and intentions necessarily disappears. The director here depends chiefly on his imagina-

tion and invention, and these are inimical to any definite system, or even sometimes to the law of consistency.

In the imagination of the artist-director activity predominates, though often it takes the form of passive fancy, comparable to an accidental discovery. But the whole artistic production is subject to his creative will. The material both of active and passive fantasy are united by the director into an harmonious whole.

* * *

In the life before him the artist-director finds chaos. He is surrounded by detached scraps and fragments of the material of life, and the director—in his work of creation—masters life, seeking what supports him, and by his artistic experience expresses both his own feeling of life and his understanding of life. He converts the chaos of actual life into harmony, and in his creation gives some special meaning to the life about him. Therefore the first necessity for a director's creative fancy is the independent activity of his consciousness in the arrangement of the material supplied by his impressions.

Speaking of imagination, I consider that the forms of fancy are made from the material received at some time or other by us from the reality that surrounds us. But I allow myself to think that the real creator can also create from nothing. If the personality of each of us forms one whole with the world, with the universe, then we can feel, guess and comprehend with the unconscious realms of our minds, that which we have never consciously assimilated.

In this way an artist can, in face of the facts or phenomena new to him,

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grasp those facts or phenomena with the unconscious region of his mind. This purely irrational capacity to feel and realize things without having recourse to elements of previous knowledge, penetrating at once, direct to the absolute reality, is termed intuition. By its aid, through feeling a thing, he comes to the comprehension and explanation of it.

Of course, it is understood that the question of feeling a thing, as such, is only a question of realizing the plan of its presentation—its exterior. With the appearance of an actor on the stage, the imagination of the director should yield place to the actual expression of the physical functions controlling the actor's performance, his creation. Here the director has to enter on a path of artistic education and to concentrate his activity, chiefly, not on what the actor does, but on how he does it.

* * *

At the rehearsals before the piece is shot, the director, when explaining the scene to the actor, says: "Feel!" (This replies to the question What?) But it is necessary to indicate to the actor not what he ought to feel, but what he ought to do with his face, or his body. (That will be How.) And in that lies the essence of the matter.

Who does not know the sufferings that actors often endure when the scene is being shot? The director demands:

"Mr. X, be freer, more unrestrained, more natural."

"But I am natural!"

"No, you are not natural!"

Who is right? Of what does being natural consist? To be natural is the most difficult thing when a man is performing.

And when a scene is being explained, such a dialogue as this often occurs between a director and an actor:

"Mr. X! You are showing indifference, but you ought to display irony!"

"I am expressing irony!"

"But no, you are not expressing it; you must feel ironical."

"I am feeling ironical!"

"No, you are not feeling ironical. I do not see that you feel ironical."

"You don't see it; but I feel it!"

"Then show it!"

"I am showing it!"

"No, you are not showing it! . . ."

Who is to blame? Is it true that the director fails to see it, or is it true that the actor fails to show it? I think that if the actor showed it, it would be apparent. Then why does he not show it? From what does this misunderstanding arise? From nothing in particular; but only because in order to show that the actor should

be able to show it, the director has to show how the feeling can be shown. One has to know how! No feeling, no naturalness, will suffice. So now we see the position of affairs. It has been explained to the actor what he should think, what he should imagine, what he should feel. And the actor really thinks, and imagines, and feels, but the director does not believe it, he does not see it. What is there to be surprised at? Is it possible to see it all? One can only see what another man does, and that is the very thing that has not been shown to the actor.

Here the question again presents itself of which we spoke previously, the question of the education of the corporal forms of expression. One should and must study one's art, because only he is an artist who can master the material of his art, overcome the obstruction of his material. And for the mastery, one has first of all to know one's material and be able to make use of it, in order, when creating, not to have to think how to deal with it.

* * *

In conclusion I should like to point out to directors the necessity of clearing the studios of outside and harmful elements. The inclination to "act for the movies", as experience shows, is not always an artistic inclination produced by a store of creative energy seeking to manifest itself in forms of space and time. Too many elements other than that of art attract people to the studio. And, unfortunately, those engaged in the business do not sufficiently oppose the entrance of these others who are not at all drawn there by an artistic impulse. I imagine that four-fifths of the actors and actresses with whom I am acquainted do not themselves know why they took up cinema work. In the majority of cases it was probably a semi-conscious endeavor to appear more prominent and important than they had done in the sphere of their former activity. They noted the success of other actors, the reports in

the press, the adoration of their admirers.

All this tempts the schoolboy who has not yet finished his studies, the young lady who is tired of inactivity, the man of means who has an impressive appearance, the lady who has magnificent toilets—and those who simply want to earn something. The false attraction of some to the cinema—and the non-resistance to this movement by others, chiefly by the directors—has created such a situation that all our studios are overflowing with people who have no capacity—and no business—to act for the cinema, and who not only lack talent but are also extremely ignorant of the most elementary demands of the business.

It is time, at last, to remove such rubbish from the studios, and to clear the way for true artists.

III.

I have already, above, had occasion to mention what it is in man that is

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his most valuable capacity in view of the demands made on him by the cinematographic art: the most valuable and dominant capacity (which distinguishes it from every other artistic material) is motion. Naturally, all the other arts that enter into the cinema have to reckon with this, and have to conform with man; that is to say, they must not lose sight of the fact that only that has real value for the screen which accords with human action. Only such scenery has artistic value as can harmonize with the human figure as the unit to which the first place belongs in the general scheme of cinema activity. So one has to remember that man can not be altered, while the settings can. Evidently if the two clash, it is the architect who is to blame, and if one has to yield to the other it is not the man to the surroundings, but the surroundings to the man.

Let us see what defects in present-day decorative art are important in the cinema, in the sense of infringing on the impression that is received from watching a moving man, and the observation of what conditions are essential to secure a location in which a man should appear really located, and not merely put. The chief principle which has to be taken as the basis of the decorative art is the man in the center. Consequently everything in the setting that has an independent value, apart from its relation to man, is at the best unessential, or even, let me plainly say—unnecessary.

Now let us see how the scenery should be formed and the settings arranged in order not to be independent artistic qualities, but to be auxiliary means to the surroundings in which the man is the center.

* * *

First of all, let us ask ourselves what we want to represent: a study in which a man is working, or a man working in a study? I do not think there can be two opinions about the matter. When we want to see handsome furniture, or other articles of luxury, we go to the windows of the suitable shops. But when we go to the cinema we go to see the action—not the study and not the expensive surroundings—but the man. And what do we find?

Think only of the absurdity of what is generally offered us in such cases. We see: 1st scene, at Prince X's. Before us is a colossal interior, neither dining-room, nor drawing-room, nor dancing-room, nor all of them together. There are endless white col-

umns, arches, niches, stairs leading up, steps leading down—carpets, drapery, flowers . . . a picture-gallery on the walls, a whole collection of bronzes, china and marble burdening the pedestals, the window-sills, the shelves, the cupboards, and even the tables. Suites of expensive furniture are pedantically set out everywhere, and there is literally nowhere, not a single corner, which has not been reached by the diligent and painstaking hand of the decorator and requisitionist. And imagine—suddenly into this room, which is neither a museum nor an antiquarian's shop, an ordinary mortal enters in ordinary present-day clothes, and sits at the table!

From the first moment the arrangement strikes one's eye by its cumbersome, its discrepancy and the complete absence of reality and truth. It is obvious at once that this is only handsome and luxuriously arranged scenery, and not a room in which people live and work. Nevertheless, the spectator's whole attention is absorbed by the ingenuity of the arches, the gobelins and articles of luxury, and the presence of the actor and his movements no longer interest the spectators.

* * *

It is plain that the man is here called on to supplement the fantasy and flourish of the architect, which is objectionable. And it is also a misfortune that following the artist-decorator from the big studio disposing of large means and a variety of material, comes the small architect from a small firm that has not at its disposal either the means or the accessories, but who also wishes at all costs to display a luxurious setting. Here we have to witness things that are in the highest degree wretched and ridiculous.

It is important to remember that every art in its efforts to represent, gives something up, sacrifices something. This sacrifice consists partly of the material of art, partly of our receptive powers. Architecture can

not do what music can do, music can not do what sculpture can accomplish; each art is impotent in face of some category of existence and sacrifices the joys which are bound up with that category. The art of the cinema is the most complex of all. If each art is itself the result of certain sacrifice, how much is the necessity of sacrifice intensified here, where the production of art results from a co-operation of all the arts?

The cinematograph is one immense mutual concession. And of all the co-operators in the associated art, up to now, the least yielding is the architect. It is true that it is more difficult for him to make concessions, because for his art the conditions of the cinema do not set bounds, but, on the contrary, give it scope and evoke it. The architect can build up all he likes without asking himself whether all that he can build should be built. He is satisfied when, watching the picture, he hears the exclamations of the spectators enchanted by his fantasy

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and his skill; but is it right for him to avail himself so of the advantages of his art, without considering that his co-workers are limited in the possibilities at their disposal?

* * *

In the cinema one should distinguish two groups of scenery:

(a) Historical sceneries, that is to say, such as represent a definite epoch, the style of which should be clearly expressed; and

(b) Sceneries representing to-day.

When arranging settings of the first group one may sometimes tolerate an excessive richness and distinctiveness in the dimensions and form of the style, with a cultural-historic aim, as it is useful and interesting for present-day spectators to see incarnated in life that of which they have only read and heard. But, all the same, a sense of proportion should indicate to the director and to the artist the limits to which the actor, as the chief scenic material of the film, may be subordinated by sacrificing him to another scenic material—to the architect, the painter and the sculptor.

In present-day plays the actor should absolutely dominate. Here the architect's art should be in reverse proportion to the actor's art. In as far as a fine and vivid presentation of the corners of the life presented is required by the actor, to that degree should the architect surround him with plain, simple, and life-like settings. Here definitely the settings should be outlined only as a background for the actor, no more, and as far as possible they should consist of the simplest architectural angles and lines.

To become a worthy co-operator in the entirety of the cinematographic art, the artist-architect must accomplish feats of self-denial by setting a voluntary limit to the possibilities open to him. The principle of this self-denial is dual; first an accordance with the possibilities of the other elements that come into the production, and second with the most essential element in the cinema—the man.

* * *

Concluding this survey of the fundamental bases of the joint art of the cinema, I can not omit to mention the fact that often all the efforts and achievements of the director, the actors, and the architects in any picture, are destroyed by a colleague of theirs who stands on a somewhat different plane of creation.

I refer to the camera-man and his art.

The ruling principle of the photographer, that a man and illumination are conceivable without scenery but that man and scenery are unimaginable without light, has proved insufficient. We know that light is essential, but what light? I think not only a light necessary for the exposure of a film, but a light which is directed, and brings out one object to greater advantage than the other objects of the given scene; a light illuminating, in the sense that it discriminates.

The photographic art, like every other art, never demands light alone—it always demands light and shade. Light and shade. They are the physics of life, the psychology of life, and the esthetics of life. Can the cinema-art, as an expression of life, get on without light and shade, or be content with light alone? Any camera-man who will consider this even a little, will understand of what achievements he deprives the present-day cinematograph.

That the actor and architect should not complain that the camera-man has ruined their creation by unskillfully lighting up one or other plane of it, lighting up one or other scene of it. It is necessary that the artist-camera-man should labor at his art equally with the director and the architect, endeavoring not to lag a step behind

them; for it is a mistake to think that the business of lighting up the actor and the settings is an affair of artistic arbitrariness or of momentary inspiration. No; in all the arts laws operate as they do in nature, and as shade is the very basis of every art (for without shade what art is there?) it is comprehensible that a knowledge of these laws is important for every artist.

Only in this way, by way of the united work of all its co-operators, will the cinema be able to overcome its enemies and detractors and triumphantly assume the high, cultural, artistic educator which its nature has decreed for it.

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HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, JULY 23, 1927

OFFER TO PRODUCERS

(Copy of a letter mailed on Monday, July 11, to Fred W. Beaton, of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America, Incorporated.)

Dear Mr. Beaton:

It has occurred to me that the producers of motion pictures are at a disadvantage in not having a medium through which they can present their side of the difference in opinion existing at present between them and their employees. The Spectator reaches everyone in the industry, but presents only views antagonistic to those held by the producers.

I wish you would inform your organization that I will be glad to give it space in The Spectator in which it may take issue with me. I will give it any number of pages that it can use legitimately in replying to arguments that I have advanced, or in presenting new arguments to support its view of the matters now at issue.

I want no pay or thanks for the space thus used. The readers of The Spectator are entitled to both sides of the case, and as I can see only one side I have to call on the producers to present the other one.

Yours very truly,

WELFORD BEATON.

Up to the time the forms for this issue of The Spectator closed the producers had not replied to the above letter. They did not even acknowledge its receipt.

* * *

Writers and Actors Should Be Organized

MOVEMENTS undertaken recently to weld screen actors and screen writers into strong organizations to force producers to conduct the motion picture business in a manner consistent with its importance are steps in the right direction. Producers have had things their own way quite long enough. Through the

media of inequitable contracts and by the practice of every form of unfairness that monetary minds could conceive they have forfeited the trust of those upon whose brains they must rely for the purely intellectual ingredients of their output. It is almost unbelievable that the employees of such a tremendous industry must fight for what employees of any other industry gain by right of employment: ordinarily honest treatment. Producers have brought about the present situation. I must admit that to one like myself, sitting on the sidelines and with no material interests at stake, the whole affair is so amusing that it is difficult to discuss it with so much gravity that the chuckles will not show through. The Spectator is dedicated to the cause of better pictures and can view with complacency the present turmoil, for all the little fellows running around Hollywood to-day can not come any nearer preventing screen art achieving its destiny than an ant can be instrumental in diverting an elephant from its course. I do not believe in unions, but I do believe in waging a fight with the most potent weapon. Only an organized movement will set matters right; consequently I am glad to see both the actors and writers organizing to present a united front. But I do not approve of everything they have done thus far. I think it was Rabelais who wrote: "The Devil was sick,—the Devil a monk would be; the Devil was well,—the devil a monk was he!" The producers are sick and with monkish piety they ask the Actors' Equity and Screen Writers' Guild to suggest a remedy for their ills. The only thing more ridiculous than the request was Equity's and the Guild's compliance with it. Very gravely these organizations outline treatments which never will be read by the producers, who know that they are valueless, for they are but general remedies for specific ills. "Give us an honest cost sheet, if there be such a thing in the industry, and we will point out to you specifically where you squandered the money of your stockholders," should have been the counter-request of the actors and writers. The actors display a belligerent spirit at a meeting and agree to unite

Have Patience!

For pictures—oh, well, you know, sometimes of course

They're worthy of the press books' ballyhoo,
And then again—perhaps they might be worse—

If worse they could be! Say, how do you
React when hope floods high, and then recedes

And Darkness spreads o'er all its pall of woe?
Are you content to drink the bitter leeds,

Or do you damn the motion picture show?

For life is all too chary with those finer tones

That bring to hearts their meed of joy or love;
And lacking chance, perhaps, or charm to win our own,

We hailed the screen as manna from above.
Ah, hope deferred, how poignant is thy pain!

How dark the night without one beam to cheer!

The noblest art that circumstance e'er gave

Must bear the load of ignorance and fear.

Can genius soar when burdened by the cross

That vulgar minds than life esteem more dear?
How reach the stars when dread of earthly loss

Condemns the soul, in grief, to linger here?

Ah, no! 'Tis written large within the book of Fate

That worth transcends the base-born's low desire;
And souls possessed of fortitude to wait

Will yet be warmed by Art's celestial fire.

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

to protect their interests, but some goof gets up and moves a resolution setting forth that the producers should be "offered the heartiest co-operation." Coercion, not co-operation, is what producers need, and it is not good strategy on the eve of battle to inform the enemy that your war clubs are stuffed with down. Actors have many legitimate grievances. They may disregard any protestations of holiness uttered by the producers and understand from the first that any improvement in their status will be granted by the producers only under compulsion, and only after it has been reduced to a written instrument drawn so carefully that the producers can not quibble their way out of it. In the matter of contracts thus far producers have had all the best of it. But all they should be made to yield is just what is fair. Even that much will agonize them.

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Writers Have Their Great Opportunity

THE actors have led in one fight that all branches of the industry should take a hand in. The whole history of human endeavor shows us that there is a certain limit within which a man must confine his mental or physical exertions if he is to work at the peak of his efficiency. This certain limit has been established throughout the civilized world as eight hours in every twenty-four. The actors ask that this universal rule be applied to the manufacture of pictures. It is reasonable, just, and sensible. There is no more reason why a man should work overtime in making a picture than he should in making a piano. Over one year ago I said in *The Spectator* that every studio in Hollywood should close at five o'clock every evening and at one o'clock on Saturday. "At that time, as it is now, my only thought was for better pictures. I hold no brief for actors, writers or directors. As individuals they can work their heads off and become nervous wrecks without disturbing the serenity of a single moment in my back garden where I do my writing. But good pictures can not be made by tired brains, and therein lies my interest. For years producers have held to the mistaken view that there was money in squeezing every possible hour of work out of every actor on the set. That they lost money for every hour over eight that they made an actor work on a given day is a fact that they lack the mental equipment to understand. They really believe it when they say that you can not apply an eight-hour day to pictures. The poor fools! Only a year ago they were saying that the public did not want pictures made from original stories. They will tell you, too, that a perfect script is impossible. Poor, poor fools! Only the application of mass strength can penetrate the density of the stupidity of producers. Of all those engaged in making pictures the writers are in the prettiest position. It is a literary art and some day they must dominate production. They have more to gain in a material way than any of their confreres. They should follow the lead of the actors and make the Guild as powerful as possible. They should do battle against the producers with more zest than any of the others, for they have been more harassed by them. Recently I have been reading copies of the contracts writers have been forced to sign upon going to work in studios. Not one of them could stand up for a moment in a court of law, but as starving was the only alterna-

five, I can understand readily why writers signed them. The abuses and the insults to which writers have been subjected at the hands of producers and supervisors should keep them in a fighting mood long enough to put over their demands for a uniform contract. But they should not rest there. They are as much interested in an eight-hour day as the actors, even though their work is of a nature that can not be limited by a time-table. They are interested because the improvement of all other conditions improves theirs. The first move of the reborn Guild should be to line up with Equity and to stand ready to join in any fight without being too finicky about whose fight it is.

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There Is Nothing to Argue About

THIS is written on Sunday, July ten, up to which date the producers have had nothing to say about the proposed eight-hour day. Perhaps before you read it some action will be taken. All I have read so far is that the producers "will give their answer." The attitude of the actors, directors and technicians should be that their demand admits of but one answer, and that there is nothing to argue about. Executives who have brought to the verge of bankruptcy what should be the most prosperous industry on earth, have not the intelligence to understand how reasonable working hours would benefit them, consequently the matter should be decided for them by those who are affected most directly. With proper organization in the studios an eight-hour day can be instituted, the cost of production will come down, pictures will be made more rapidly and will average higher in entertainment value. Producers, of course, will disagree with my conclusions, but as they are the people whose ignorance and general incompetence have got motion pictures into their present mess, their opinion on anything pertaining to their business is really not a matter of great importance. No doubt they see in the demand for an eight-hour day only an effort by those whom it affects to get more pay by working overtime. No doubt some of the actors so regard it. Only to the extent that an eight-hour day becomes an actuality is *The Spectator* with the actors in their demand for it. Producers should see to it that enough work is crowded into the eight hours so that no overtime is necessary. It can be done, but I doubt if there is enough executive brains in the studios now to do it. An eight-hour day and a uniform contract are two things that all those engaged in making motion pictures should insist upon. They have their bosses—a timid bunch at best—on the run, and there is justice in their demand for these two reforms. *The Spectator* is with them most heartily. As soon as they show signs of abusing the power they possess *The Spectator* will be against them just as heartily. Extremes must be avoided. For instance, take the way Al Rockett regards the demand for an eight-hour day. As a representative producer he is quoted in the *Times* as follows: "All I can say is that if stars and other important actors insist upon the eight-hour-a-day schedule, most of the producers will have to return to the bond business, or selling clothing, from which they started." In a crisis like the present Rockett, and, indeed, all the rest of us, should remain calm and not look at the future through too rosy glasses. I am

a firm believer in an eight-hour day, and I believe it will do pictures a great deal of good, but in my wildest imaginings my optimism never has matched Al Rockett's. If he can demonstrate that his prophecy would be fulfilled any argument that I could advance in support of the reform would be weak and puerile. In fact, the argument would be closed. It would be the height of silliness for any one to criticize adversely a movement that would send our present crop of motion picture producers back to the clothing business. But I can not share Al's enthusiasm. In his support of the reform he should show more restraint. Anyway, it is dangerous to drive our producers into other lines of endeavor. Apparently Louis B. Mayer and Cecil de Mille wandered into the money-lending business, and see what happened to them!

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Why the Producers Abandoned the Idea

THE HASTE with which the producers agreed that, after all, they didn't care so very much whether there was any salary cut was the high comedy spot of the very comical flurry that was staged four weeks ago. There is no reason why the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences should take too much umbrage to its soul in connection with the action of the producers in abandoning the idea of a raid on salaries. The Academy merely provided the producers with an opportunity to bow themselves out gracefully. It was their own shrewdness that prompted them to take advantage of it. With the aid of their press agents they got out rather well. Pete Smith made the best job of it, getting Louis B. Mayer from under quite gracefully. Jesse Lasky is the only one in the bunch whose course I admire. He was the first to take a stand for lower salaries and the last man to stand by his guns when retreat was sounded. He has not yet surrendered wholly. He may enforce the salary cut on the first of August. I do not agree with his views; I believe that he personally is responsible for the inefficiency which exists in his studio, but I admire him for having enough nerve to try to see the thing through after he had started it. Those whom a salary cut would affect should not accept too seriously the protestations of the Mayers and Schencks that the idea of the reduction was wrong. They tried to put it over, and withdrew it only because they discovered that if they did not withdraw the world at large would find out how hopelessly incompetent they are at running their own ends of the business. They did not abandon the idea of a cut in salaries because the Academy asked them to, or through any regard for the welfare of their employees. There is not one in the bunch who would not cut salaries to-morrow if he were not afraid that his efficiency would become a point at issue between him and his employees. Louis B. Mayer retreated in exactly the same manner as I would have if I had been in his place. He made a virtue out of a necessity, and had Pete Smith write him a beautiful speech about how much he had the welfare of his employees at heart. There was nothing else left for him to do. Of course it is all bunk, and coming from Mayer, is funny. His whole career in pictures has been one of selfishness. His standard employment contract is notorious for its one-sidedness, and he would scream at anyone who would ask for time to consider it before signing it. Yet when he deserted Jesse Lasky he

issued a statement dripping with his high regard for the interests of his employees. Only fools would be deluded by it. The truth of the situation is that the producers never for a moment imagined that their royal decree would not be received by their employees in the same spirit of humility that always has been manifested on the lots. As soon as the employees pointed out the real cause of extravagance in production the producers beat a hasty retreat. Their cowardice, not a higher motive, prompted the action.

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What Constitutes Studio Extravagance

THE COST of production should come down, but nothing that the producers have done yet would indicate that they know how to do it. Lasky's effort to stem extravagance is pathetic. He organized a committee which includes among its members such well known economists as Bebe Daniels and Wally Beery, and he generously offers to lend the committee to the Academy in order that the whole industry may profit by contact with it. I have not much faith in Lasky's method, but I have respect for the honesty of his intention. Mayer's statement would indicate that he has organized all his employees into one vast committee on savings, an equally futile move. The crust of inefficiency that coats the Mayer organization is too thick to yield to delicate treatment with a lancet. It is a blasting proposition. A lot of incompetents must be jarred loose from their jobs before saving can be effected. It will be time enough for any studio to apply a remedy when it understands the disease. What contributes to the excessive cost of production? Let us consider the Metro organization. The conclusions we arrive at in our examination of it will apply to other organizations. The first thing we discover is that it has a gigantic overhead for which there is no justification whatever. Enormous salaries are paid for fifty-two weeks to people who do not work for a quarter of that time. Actors and directors roam around the lot ready for work, but there is no work for them. Writers with capable picture minds are not allowed to reflect their personalities on the screen, the quality that the screen needs to give it the variety it so sadly lacks. Irving Thalberg has a certain flair for pictures, but more than offsets it with a total ignorance of the economics of making pictures. I suppose he wastes more money every year than any other man connected with any industry in the world. Harry Rapf is one of the most decent chaps in the business, but he doesn't understand what kind of a business it is. Hunt Stromberg and Bernie Hyman know nothing about screen values. There may be others, but I believe these four men dominate Metro production. Under them shooting begins on pictures before the scripts for them are developed. Thousands of dollars are spent in erecting sets that never reach the screen. Actors work for weeks and all we see of them on the screen could be shot in one day. Twice as many scenes are shot as can be crowded into the footage required for the completed picture. Some pictures are so awful that they are shelved, every dollar spent on them being a total loss. Others for which actors are employed and receive salaries for weeks are never begun. I have personal knowledge of a case of one actor who received a call to go to work on the Metro lot. He roamed around for a

week trying to discover who had called him, and why. At the end of that time he was given a check for seven hundred dollars and was told the production had been called off. I saw the check. Most of the pictures are so bad after they are edited that retakes are necessary, as well as much title-writing and excessive pawing over, all of which contribute to the excessive cost. All of these abuses have ramifications that spread throughout the organization. A thousand dollars wasted entails as much bookkeeping as a thousand dollars spent wisely. They are abuses which Louis B. Mayer thinks he can cure by retaining in office the people responsible for them, and by asking everyone on the lot to stop, look and listen. He will tell you that in making pictures waste can not be avoided. And in that he is absolutely wrong. If he were qualified for the position he holds he would know it is wrong. Also, if he were qualified for his position there would be no waste.

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With Apologies to Bebe and Wally

PRESUMING that I am right in pointing out the various ways in which Mayer's organization ruthlessly squanders money, let us see if we can devise a practical remedy. I am a little diffident in approaching the task now that Bebe Daniels and Wally Beery have entered the lists as picture economists, but in the hope that I can get my plan to the public before they have cured all the ills that afflict the screen, I will go ahead, and hope Bebe will pardon my impetuosity. John Colton is on the Metro pay-roll. He is a great dramatist, and it is a safe presumption that he can write good screen material. On the pay-roll also are men and women skilled in writing continuity. One of them, whom we will call Bill, works with John. Let us suppose that the lot has been reformed and that production is being handled intelligently. John writes a story for a picture and Bill begins to put it into shape for shooting. Any weaknesses in John's story crop up in Bill's continuity. They take all the time they want. They quarrel over this scene and that one, rearrange the sequences and change their characterizations. At last they are satisfied. They have a good script. The director who can handle that kind of story to good advantage is assigned to it. He estimates the footage that every scene will take and discovers that the total will be eight thousand feet. The picture is to be released in seven reels. John, Bill and the director go over the script and finally get it down to the proper footage. A shooting schedule is drawn up, providing for the highest paid actors being killed off first. All salaries start the day the people go to work. The script being perfect in every detail, the director shoots it as written. There's your cure for all the production ills. John and Bill having had all the time they needed, their script was inspiration-proof when they completed it, consequently there is precious little excessive footage when editing begins. That means quick and economical editing. Every scene being shot as described in the script means that the script titles fit the action, consequently the picture is titled automatically as it is edited. Every scene shot being in the picture means that no money was wasted on building sets that were not used or in employing actors who did not act. Every hour spent in shooting yielded

something that reached the screen. John and Bill being masters of their craft eliminated the necessity for supervision. To balance the program of releases a romantic drama was needed and John was instructed to write one. That was the extent of the supervision. At the same time other Johns and Bills, and Jennies and Bessies on the lot were preparing stories for the rest of the releases. They were trained to write directly for the screen, not for the Thalbergs and Rapfs. Just enough directors would be on the pay-roll to keep the program moving. They would not be important, for any man after brief training would be able to direct from a perfect script. Perhaps John's picture would be a flop. It might not be about a subject that the public liked. But it would have the virtues of being well made and costing about half what its present flops cost Metro. The advantage of my system would be that it would be almost certain to produce a successful picture, whereas by the present supervisor plan the Metro system is almost certain to produce a flop. One of the greatest imbecilities of the Mayer organization is its adherence to the contract player system. There are eight or ten stars whom it would be wise to keep under contract, but every other contract is an individual example of utter idiocy. If Mayer, Thalberg, and Rapf had any qualifications for the jobs they hold they would understand without prompting that the way they run the contract system is both an economic and an artistic blunder.

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Perfect Script a Cure for All Ills

ONE thing that Lasky, Mayer, Schenck, Laemmle and the rest of them do not seem to be able to get into their heads is that the story is the only thing that counts. The perfect script suggests its own cast and director. It automatically effects every saving that the producers are striving for. A succession of perfect scripts on the Paramount lot would do its own thinning out of the pay-roll, for it would reveal those who are of no value to production. I have a high regard for Ben Schulberg's picture ability. With him to keep the program balanced, and a staff of thoroughly trained and tested writers Paramount could be turning out twice as good pictures for half as much money as it is spending now. Bernie Fineman, Lloyd Sheldon, and Bennie Zeidman now stand in the way of either economy or art in Paramount pictures. It is inconceivable to me how Lasky can figure that people without creative brains can make any contribution to a creative art. Perhaps Bebe and Wally will be able to show him how he can save some money by refraining from painting a wheelbarrow or by using the exposed insides of in-coming envelopes for inter-office communicating, but he never will effect any saving that counts until he forgets all about saving and gives all his thoughts to the manner in which a picture should be produced. The better the picture, the greater profits it will earn. The screen industry is in the fortunate position of making a product that is perfect only in the degree that the right amount of money is spent on it. Building sets that do not reach the screen means that the script could not have been perfect, for you can not take a piece out of perfection and have perfection left. Therefore the right amount of money means the amount a perfect script calls for, and you can not be either economical or extravagant with a

perfect script. It makes the cost absolute. Producers who are bellyaching about high costs should cease making further asses of themselves by dabbling at reforms in a manner that reveals their abysmal ignorance of what they are trying to reform. If they reversed their mental process and thought of the story first and money last there would be no waste. Consider the way they go at things now. Lasky decides that Moritz Stiller is to do an Emil Jannings picture at a cost of a quarter million dollars. This is the annual budget, prepared a year before the shooting is to begin on that particular picture. As there is no story in sight how, I ask you, can Jesse know it is going to take a quarter million dollars to make a picture from it? But a shooting date is fixed. It is decided that, say, Louise Dresser and Gustav von Seyffertitz are to support Jannings. They are engaged to start at a certain time, and they go on the pay-roll at that time, even if it be weeks before shooting begins, the reason for the delay being the difficulty in getting the story ready, although the studio knew one year ahead that such a picture was to be made. If all the thought had been put on the story from the first everything else could have slipped into its place without any lost motion and without any waste of money. Any one with brains enough to grasp the fundamentals of the business does not need to be told that it simply is a business of telling stories on the screen, and that the story therefore must be the all-important thing. Producers lack the necessary brains. They seem to think that the screen industry is something that God provided for the purpose of taking care of their relatives.

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Should Fight Until Reforms Instituted

BUT out of the present turmoil will emerge a greatly improved screen art if full advantage be taken of the opportunity the turmoil offers. Before the supervisor system was inaugurated pictures averaged much higher than they do now. They have been growing worse steadily as the full effect of the system manifested itself. Few pictures have any literary merit and still fewer contain any notable acting. Yet there are many excellent writers in Hollywood and still more excellent actors. The positions of the writer and actor will be improved when pictures are produced properly. Inefficiency is rooted so strongly that improving conditions will be a long process, but it is worth undertaking. Those who will gain materially from the recognition of the value of brains, and those whose only interest is the improvement of pictures, should unite forces and give producers no rest until reforms are instituted. The brains of the industry did not invite the present fight. The producers started it and abandoned it only when they realized that the only outcome would be the exposure of their own incompetence. It should not be allowed to rest where it is. The screen is a glorious art, but will achieve its destiny only by fighting its way through the managerial stupidity that now retards its development. A producer can prosper permanently only to the extent that his pictures have merit, but apparently the only method by which he can be made to realize it is by clubbing him into insensibility and injecting the knowledge into him while he is unconscious. He must be made to realize that the screen is a literary art and that literary minds must make their impress on

its output. We never will have perfect pictures on the screen until we have perfect pictures on paper, and only authors can write them perfectly. And they can write them perfectly only when they are rid of ignorant supervision. The story must be recognized as the only thing that matters. At the present time Metro has so many contract players on its pay-roll that stories must be written to fit actors. Not until actors are made to fit stories can we have better pictures. If Metro retained only its stars and had all the rest of Hollywood in which to look for its supporting players it would be saving a tremendous sum every week and at the same time would be giving us much better pictures. The initial mistake of the producers was to lift screen entertainment out of the twenty-five cent class. That is all anyone should pay to see a picture. But as long as the universal charge is about twice that sum writers, actors and directors are entitled to twice a normal wage and should be alert to resist any further effort of the producers to make them the first victims of a return to normal conditions. Ordinarily I would be the last person to advocate a state of warfare in any industry, but with the welfare of the screen as an art as my first consideration, my advice to the writers and actors would be to give chase to the retreating producers and keep up the fight until reforms are instituted. H. L. Mencken writes me that the East is interested very much in the salary cut comedy. Producers have informed the outside world that those who actually make the pictures are paid too highly. It is only fair to present both sides of the case. The outside world should be informed of the incompetence of the producers. Writers and actors should unite to spread the information. I would not advise directors to join such a movement. The more sanely the industry is conducted, the less important will their position in it become.

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It's Going to Be a Tough Proposition

WHEN one considers the mental caliber of the producers, who must be made to see virtue in a suggested remedy before it can be applied, it seems to be a hopeless task to endeavor to introduce sanity into the making of pictures. Their total inability to grasp the fundamentals of their business is the greatest stumbling block in the way of reform. Schenck, Lasky and Mayer think they know all about everything that enters into the making of their product. A merely ignorant man may be taught something; the one who confuses ignorance with knowledge is a difficult proposition. The last point that the producers will yield is that literary minds should dominate the creative end of this purely literary art. Most of our screen executives resent the brains of the writers and envy them their culture. Their money gives them contact with an art too subtle for them to understand, but by association with which they hope to rise to a social level that God failed to equip them for. It is going to be difficult to persuade them that it is not their money that makes pictures successes, that the whole industry rests upon the brains of authors. The queer thing about it is that the money-loving producers can not see that they would make much more money if they would permit pictures to be made sensibly. As I have said previously, perfect scripts would automatically cure the

industry of all its ills, yet every studio pays big salaries to supervisors who stand in the way of perfect scripts. Writing a screen story differs very little from writing a novel. The major tasks are the same, the telling of a logical and entertaining story. It is no more difficult for an author to write without assistance a manuscript for a publisher than it is for another author to write without assistance a scenario for a director. But I suppose when Louis B. Mayer reads a book by Booth Tarkington he wonders how in God's name Booth ever managed to write it without Harry Rapf's advice. There will be some hope for Mayer as a motion picture producer if he can be made to see that when Harry Rapf becomes qualified to tell Booth Tarkington how a novel should be written, he will be qualified to tell a screen writer how a scenario should be written. The kind of pictures we are getting now is the kind of books we would be getting if every author had to work under a supervisor who knew nothing about literature. Supervisors will resist any effort to improve screen conditions. Perfect scripts will eliminate them. They will argue that perfect scripts are impossible to secure because there are no people trained to write them. They do not know this to be true. They have not allowed authors to demonstrate how far they could go in writing directly for the screen, the way every screen story should be written. But I'll grant that there may not be now a sufficient number of sufficiently trained writers to provide enough perfect scripts to keep production programs moving. Then it is up to producers to allow writers to train themselves. In the very first Spectator published, number one of volume one, I advocated this training, so the idea is not a new one with me. Any manufactured article to be perfect must be made of perfect raw material. The story is the raw material out of which a picture is made. In the case of the screen it happens to be an industry that can manufacture its product economically only to the extent that the raw material has been perfected before the process of fabrication begins.

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Colman Great in "The Magic Flame"

RONALD COLMAN as both the hero and the heavy in a picture is a cinematic novelty. In *Magic Flame* he plays a circus clown who looks like a prince, and a king, formerly the prince, who looks like a circus clown. The clown role is the heroic one. In it Colman is the same suave, polished actor who has a tremendous following among picture patrons. At best, however, all leading roles are pretty much alike, and everything that Colman does as the hero of this story we have seen him do many times before. And he always does them well. He has an air of refinement and distinction about him that no other leading man can match. He carries that same air into his characterization of the prince, a particularly vicious libertine, and in the role he gives the only really notable performance that has been permitted him in pictures, the only one in which he was not called upon mainly to be himself. As a heavy he is splendid, bringing to the part the same finesse that has made him stand out as a leading man, and adding to it a sinister quality and a callousness that prove him to be a really admirable actor. His characterization as the profligate prince and Henry King's direction are the features of this latest Banky-

Colman picture which Sam Goldwyn soon will present to the public. It is a good picture, except for its impossible titles. It is a romantic drama, and is strong in both romance and drama. There are several big scenes in it and they are directed most effectively by King, who more than atones in this picture for any of the weaknesses of Barbara Worth for which he may have been responsible. Goldwyn maintains a higher quality in his pictures than any other producer, and it is greatly to his credit that he never presents Miss Banky and Colman in a production that tends to detract from their box office value. He has given *The Magic Flame* a superb setting, and George Barnes and Thomas Brannigan have photographed it wonderfully well. The lighting is a striking feature. In fact, I never saw lights and shadows handled more effectively in any American picture. Henry King is one of the most intelligent directors we have. He commits none of the standard faults that mar so many pictures. There is not a foot of film in *Magic Flame* that bears witness to carelessness or lack of intelligence in direction. The circus atmosphere of the opening scenes is established admirably, although in their first love scene the circus performers speak titles that detract from it. They are beautiful titles—much more beautiful than such people would speak. There are titles that could not have been written by George Marion, Jr., and there are others which could have been written by no one else. When I saw the picture there were no credits presented on the screen, and I have made no inquiries since, but if Marion did not write the offending titles they were written so nearly in his style that it is all right to blame him for them. The chief fault of many of them was that they struck a jarring note. At times when the whole spirit of scenes demanded that Colman should preserve a kingly attitude he was given spoken titles that were cheap and inane wisecracks. They showed that Goldwyn committed a mistake that is committed so frequently: he regarded the titles, not as an integral part of the picture, but as something that should stand out as a separate feature. The mood of the titles did not even remotely match the mood of the scenes. They stood out like knotty protruberances on the smoothness of Henry King's direction, and were about as much in place as a drunken man at a church wedding. And I am quite satisfied that Sam Goldwyn will not have the slightest idea what I am talking about, for he approved the titles and my line of reasoning is too deep for anyone who could not see at a glance that such lowbrow titles have no place in such a highbrow picture.

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Von Sternberg Scores With "Underworld"

JUST one year and one day ago I said in *The Spectator* that Josef von Sternberg "some day will be one of the outstanding figures of the screen". I had seen two pictures directed by him, *A Woman of the Sea* and *The Exquisite Sinner*. I have not seen his first bid for fame, *Salvation Hunters*. But I thought I saw enough in the two pictures that I did view to give me confidence in the young man's future. My confidence is strengthened by his latest picture, *Underworld*. It is a remarkable exhibition of screen craftsmanship, and stamps Von Sternberg as a really capable director. He is a master dramatist and builds his drama with every means at his

command: acting, sets, camera, lighting and grouping. He seems to possess what the vast majority of our directors lack: a thoroughly intelligent conception of the materials and processes that play a part in the making of a picture. In *A Woman of the Sea*, a rugged drama of a fishing village, he provides a rhythmic swing by cuts to the ocean's combers, and he uses with fine effect the flights of thousands of sea-gulls. The production is almost poetic. In *Underworld* he gets as far away from the purity of a sea breeze, as far removed from the music of poetry, as the dramatic pendulum can swing. His chief character is a thief and murderer; his male lead a drunken accomplice of criminals; his leading woman the mistress of the thief and murderer. For the most part his scenes are peopled with the scum of the underworld, and a criminal court is the most respectable interior to which he leads his audience. It is just a cheap, melodramatic crook story, a dramatization of the first page of a penny dreadful, and if accorded the conventional screen treatment would have been only another lurid movie. But Von Sternberg is not conventional. The soul of the poet still shines in his work, but it is hard and harsh and stark, and it hurries along at a breath-taking rate that makes you sit still and breathe hard; that makes you love George Bancroft while you are hoping that he will be hanged. And through all the impure atmosphere of the picture runs a vein of pure gold: the loyalty of a criminal and the mistress of a criminal for the man whose mistress the latter is. And there is a love story, as clean and lofty and noble as one would expect to find in a rose garden. All these warring elements Von Sternberg has woven into what I am confident will be regarded as the most intelligently directed crook drama that ever has reached the screen. I believe *Salvation Hunters* gave Von Sternberg a reputation as a long-haired nut who never gave a thought to his audience. *Underworld* proves that he regards his audience as of considerable importance. It is an audience picture and is conspicuously above the average that Paramount has maintained for the past year. George Bancroft gives a powerful performance, one of the outstanding characterizations of the year. Fred Kohler, a man who has been a conventional heavy for years without getting very far, shows by his work in this picture that he is an excellent actor. Evelyn Brent and Clive Brook contribute perfect performances. There is none of the extravagant acting that we look for in underworld dramas. Von Sternberg apparently holds the view that the audience is interested only in the story and that it is not yearning to be impressed with the cast's acting ability or his skill as a director. He subjugates everything to the story and achieves the greatest art of all—the art that conceals art. I am quite sure that soon he will be recognized as one of the outstanding figures of the screen.

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This Is All About Catching a Whale

JACK BARRYMORE has had a couple of very entertaining articles in recent issues of the *Ladies Home Journal*. "Hamlet in Hollywood" they were called, and they were rich in humor as well as containing a lot of shrewd observations. One of the incidents which he relates deals with the efforts Warner Brothers went to to provide a whale for *The Sea Beast*. They built one and

transported it to San Pedro, where it very promptly sank without leaving any trace of the thirty thousand dollars it cost. I often have wondered why the Warners did not cast a real whale for the part. It would not have been difficult. There are plenty of whales loafing off the shores of Southern California and it would be no great feat to get shots of some stirring scenes in which they play the leading parts. I know what I am talking about. I went out the other day and got a whale. Every one I tell about it seems to be surprised. All I had to exhibit in proof of my statement was a sunburned nose, for I couldn't very well bring the damn thing home with me. It weighed seventy tons and there wasn't room in my car for it, even if I could have dragged it out of the water. One night I was complaining to Mrs. Spectator that the necessity of writing *The Spectator* kept me so tied down that I couldn't accompany Barrett Keisling to British Columbia to fish for trout in streams I know so well. The telephone rang and Perry Wood asked me how I would like to go out next day and catch a whale. I thought I got him wrong and asked him to spell it. He did and it was whale all right. "Sure, I'll go," I told him, and at six o'clock next morning he rattled the screen on one of my bedroom windows and in two hours we were heading for San Clemente Island in a whaling vessel. Before eleven o'clock we sighted our first whale, but the captain passed it up because it weighed only fifty tons. The night before I was pining away because I couldn't catch a two-pound fish and the captain passed up one weighing one hundred thousand pounds! He said we'd get a real one later. We did. Whales help you catch them. Every little while they spout to let you know where they are. Mighty handsome of them, I'll say. Our Little Toto spouted nine times while we were approaching him. To say that I was intensely excited gives you but an anaemic and flaccid idea of my feelings. I was uproarious inside. Little Toto came up right under the nose of our boat. He was so big that we could have played golf on his back. The gun spoke, the harpoon went home and Toto started for the bottom of the ocean with a speed that made the winch roar. Finally it stopped after a mile or so of rope had been run out. The gunner's shot had been aimed with merciful accuracy. The whale died at the end of his first run. We pulled him up, lashed him to the ship's side, and towed him to Venice, where you perhaps saw him on exhibition on the Fourth of July. I got home the same night. Hollywood is some place to live in. Fancy getting out of your own bed in the morning, getting a whale, and returning to your bed for your next regular sleep. I thought I had fed on all the conveniently acquired thrills the world

Writing for United Artists

JACK JEVNE

"TEMPEST" *John Barrymore*
 "BREAKFAST" *Constance Talmadge*
 "MCFADDEN'S FLATS" *First National*
 "LADIES AT PLAY" *First National*
 "CLINGING VINE" *Leatrice Joy*
 "EVE'S LEAVES" *Leatrice Joy*

Writers' Club — HOLLYWOOD 7145

had to offer, but, believe me, all of them rolled together do not give you the wallop that catching a whale does. I want to try it again. If enough of you fellows will join me we'll get a boat some Sunday morning and I'll guarantee your emotions the greatest rampage they've ever had. Are you on?

* * *

"Smile, Brother, Smile" Brims Over with Smiles

JACK MULHALL scores again. This time it is in *Smile, Brother, Smile*, a picture produced by Charles R. Rogers for First National release. It's a corking comedy. It deals with the weals and woes of traveling salesmen and sparkles all the way through. Mulhall has advanced of late to the small circle of men whom I never fail to see when their pictures come along. He has a cheerful screen personality and an aptitude for comedy that is refreshing. In this picture he had the advantage of John Francis Dillon's intelligent direction. It is a business story, and it was a relief to get away for at least one evening from the standard model comedies and dramas that draw out their endless procession on the screen. Ten or fifteen years ago there were many business and industrial pictures and the impression I retain of that period is that the stories were better then than they are now. I am not a business man, even if running *The Spectator* does become a bigger business proposition every month, but I can get a great kick out of a dollars-and-cents story well told on the screen. Of course I want my love stuff, too, but I like to have it sprinkled over something substantial, as it is in *Smile, Brother, Smile*. There is a delightful love theme running through the picture, Dorothy Mackaill being the girl in the case. She is quite all right, and as there is a suggestion of fluffiness in her hair she looks much more captivating than she did in something or other a short time ago when I criticized her for spoiling her beauty by having her hair plastered down in a most unbecoming manner. As a general thing I do not include hairdressing among the subjects which I endeavor to appear competent to discuss, but on that occasion Dorothy's hair got my goat. This time it is all right. Dillon admirably maintains the traveling-man flavor throughout, and injects comedy touches that will be responsible for much laughter. The titles are particularly good. They were written by Dwinelle Benthal and Rufus McCosh, and are rich in humor that does not depart from the atmosphere of the picture, a virtue which the comedy touches also possess. There is some comedy on board a sleeping car and it has nothing to do with the story, but it is pro-

duced by a number of traveling men, which makes it quite admissible, because the story is about traveling men. The comedy relief that is objectionable is that which is not in keeping with the atmosphere of the picture in which it appears. It is not a breach of picture technic to make excursions from the thread of a story if the excursions do not go beyond its atmosphere, but when both story and atmosphere are forgotten the comedy relief becomes completely extraneous and the picture suffers as a consequence. T. Roy Barnes and two or three others are traveling men in *Smile, Brother, Smile*, and provide a lot of fun. It is not a perfect picture, and there are a few things in it that might be criticized, but it is clean, amusing, and entertaining, and when a picture is all that it should be allowed to contain a few faults.

* * *

"Becky's a Lady" a Good Picture

JAMES FLOOD has made a really excellent job out of *Becky's a Lady*. It is one of the best prize fight pictures I ever saw. Perhaps its most interesting feature is the debut of James Gleason as a screen actor. It was his human characterization that made *Is Zat So?* a great success on the stage, and he brings the same human quality, the same poise and sincerity to the screen. He does little acting of the obvious sort, but his personality registers strongly. The stories of *Is Zat So?* and *Becky's a Lady* are similar in that in each Gleason is the manager of a prize fighter who is pretty much of a dumbbell. The love between the two men is the dominant note in both stories, and is developed on the screen as effectively as it was on the stage. Harry Hoyt made a capital adaptation of the late Gerald Beaumont's story, and Charlie Logue prepared a good shooting script. Arthur Shadur supervised the production. All of them deserve credit, even though the picture was not free from faults when I saw it. The chief defect was the terrible punctuation of the titles. Lloyd Nosler's editing contained one sin that no film editor should commit. Jobyna Ralston and Charlie Ray indulge in a love scene while they are sitting on a sofa, and most of it is shown in individual close-ups. Both characters always should be in a love scene. Under no circumstance should it be cut into separate close-ups of the two characters that are essential to it. I bumped into the sidewalk conference after the preview and Nosler told me that the scene would be shown in a medium shot, so it will be all right—if he keeps his word. Charlie Ray gives an excellent performance. He has one opportunity to rise to dramatic heights and does it most convincingly. It is a splendid scene, one of the best I have seen on the screen in a long time. Jobyna has one of the standard girl parts, and leaves nothing to be desired. That clever youngster, Arthur Lake, plays Jobyna's brother, a good for nothing lad who sponges on his sister. It is a fine characterization. We have few boys of Arthur's age on the screen, and none of the rest can hold a candle to him when it comes to real acting. He's going a long way. Universal should hang on to him. We get a few glimpses of that very fine character woman, Edythe Chapman, who never fails to give a good performance; and Charles Sellon also comes through with a good performance. Flood's direction reveals his appreciation of the dramatic and human qualities of the story. Only in the scenes in which

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it belongs does he permit his characters to indulge in histrionics. For the most part he rests content with telling his story, and he tells it in a manner that never allows the attention of the audience to wander. His handling of a fight sequence in which Ray meets the champion is splendid. He makes the fight dramatic, without lessening its appeal as a sporting event. The picture is free from interpolated comedy, a virtue which few program pictures possess. Any picture constructed intelligently has no place in it for "comedy relief", but we have so few people who can construct them intelligently that when one comes along we are surprised.

* * *

Laura La Plante's Fine Performance

LAURA LA PLANTE never before gave such a scintillating performance on the screen as she does in *Silk Stockings*, her next Universal release. The downright cleverness of it is a revelation of her powers as a comedienne. The story is a frothy little thing, but it is directed with consummate skill by Wesley Ruggles, making the picture the most engaging comedy that has come from the Universal studio in a long time. It is delightful all the way through, principally on account of the splendid performance of the star, who keeps the audience in a continuous roar of laughter by her very intelligent portrayal of a young wife who has a great capacity for being jealous of her husband. In one long court room scene she is superb. Entirely in pantomime she tells the story of her husband's courtship, and his addiction to gambling, drinking, and personal cruelty, all of which the audience knows are figments of her brain. It is the longest sustained and cleverest pantomime that stands to the credit of any of our screen comedians of either sex, and will win Laura a host of new admirers. Burr McIntosh is the judge before whom she gives her testimony, and he makes a large contribution to the comedy values of the sequence. I had no idea that Burr had such a delicious sense of comedy. Every cut from Laura to him was followed by another burst of laughter, so admirably did the old trouper maintain the fun of the scenes. *Silk Stockings* is clean for its entire length, and so easily could have been otherwise, for it contains some scenes that, to say the least, are intimate. For instance, Laura goes to bed in William Austin's room, and later hides in a clothes hamper at the end of a bathtub in which he prepares to take a bath; but Ruggles handles all such scenes with the best of taste that enhances, instead of detracting from, their mirth-provoking qualities. Less discriminating direction would have made *Silk Stockings* a farce so broad that it would have been vulgar, and no departure from the script would have been necessary to make it so. The more I see of Ruggles's work the more I am impressed with his ability for handling light comedy. The picture is rich in production value and contains many striking shots. One feature worthy of emulation is the presence in a swimming pool sequence of some extras who are expert divers. They give an air of reality to the scenes. Johnnie Harron plays the male lead, a part rich in the comedy possibilities that he always demonstrates an ability to realize. I like to see Harron on the screen. He is a nice looking boy, but is a modification of the standard model of masculine pulchritude that we are so used to gazing upon. William Austin also is in

this picture and he gives another of his silly-ass performances which always are provocative of much mirth. Otis Harlan is another member of the cast who also makes a considerable contribution to the hilarity of the affair, and Marcella Daly provides much beauty and some brains in a small part. The story was adapted by Beatrice Van, and Joseph Poland wrote the continuity and was story supervisor for the production. Excellent titles were written by Albert de Monde. I have seen quite a number of Universal pictures of late that I have liked, and I think it is about time someone was speaking up and giving Henry Hennigson, general manager for Universal, some credit for the improvement in the company's output. Under his regime Universal pictures are averaging higher than they ever did before.

* * *

"Chang" Great Because it's Real

CHANG is engrossing for the same reason that *Seventh Heaven* is engrossing. Each gives the impression of being absolutely real. Chang accomplishes with the jungle and wild animals what motion picture producers rarely achieve with man-built sets and trained actors. Bimbo, the untrained white monkey, is the best comedian I ever saw on the screen. His acting is perfect, and there never yet has been on the screen a man who can act perfectly. There is a lesson in Chang for every man who makes a picture, and for every man and woman who appear in one. Screen acting got off to a wrong start. It aped the stage. The motion picture in one brief leap became a complete art, but it took to itself conventions that centuries of development had lent to a sister art, the stage. It ranted and struck poses, habits which it borrowed from the stage, with which it had little in common, although it still is held by many that it has much in common with the older art. The stage even in its highest development never was real. It never completely fooled us into forgetting that we were looking at actors roaming in painted forests. The actors were conscious that the forests were painted and became almost as artificial as their surroundings. They were not natural; they acted. They had to train their voices and their memories, and their physical acting became as much a mental effort as the reading of their lines. The screen borrowed its acting technic from the stage, and it has not outlived it. It still has an air of artificiality. The forests on the screen are real, but the actors are not. They reflect a painted forest environment. The development of screen acting will be towards complete natural-

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ness. Pictures to-day are artistic successes only to the extent that they are natural. Chang is an overwhelming success because we know that it is natural. It takes us into a jungle that we know is not painted, and introduces us to people whom we know are not actors, and every foot of the film enralls us. It is a wonderful motion picture because it is a motion picture, and not a movie. Its absolute lack of acting makes it the best acted picture we ever have seen. All our Hollywood-made pictures are over-acted. On the stage the actor has to strive to make us forget that the forest is painted; on the screen the forest is real, and the actor does not need to make us forget it. His only task is to be as natural as the forest, but only babies accomplish it. They are the only perfect human actors we have. The outstanding director of the future will be he who makes us believe that a butcher is a butcher, not an actor. Most of our pretty girls who have become famous on the screen and have millions of friends who proclaim them great, have gained reputations as actresses by virtue of the fact that they know nothing about acting, but are the fortunate possessors of the knack of being almost natural. They would be completely natural, and greater favorites, if they realized that they are not actresses and wasted none of their energy upon trying to convey a different impression. No one acts in *Chang*. All the human characters go about their daily occupations, but they live in an atmosphere of drama, and *Chang*, in recording faithfully this atmosphere, becomes one of the greatest dramas ever filmed. When we have more directors who can create atmosphere and make their characters part of it, we will have more motion pictures that will be almost great.

* * *

"When a Man Loves" Is Quite Impossible

MANON LESCAUT, the principal character of *When a Man Loves*, is presented to us frankly as an attractive young woman who rates her love of jewelry above her love of virtue. First she lives with the man she loves; then she is inveigled into the arms of another man and apparently is content to remain there as he has more money than her lover. The second man drapes jewels all over her, and when she tires of him she goes back to her lover and unblushingly tells him that she can not give up the jewels of the man who bought her, thereby being untrue to that clause of the harlot's code which says a bought woman should stay bought. The lover is presented as exactly the kind of poor sap who would love a woman of that sort. And it is in such char-

acterizations as this that Dolores Costello and John Barrymore make a bid for our sympathy in *When a Man Loves*. The story is as devoid of virtue as *Manon Lescaut*. It is planted in various conversations that Jack Barrymore most conveniently overhears. All that it accomplishes in the first half is to bring the man and woman together and then separate them, a series of uneventful reels being devoted to the purpose. When Barrymore goes searching for Dolores they most conveniently appear in a low dive at the same time and almost, but not quite, discover one another. Griffith did the same thing in *Orphans of the Storm*, but he tugged at our heartstrings when he did it. In *When a Man Loves* Alan Crosland, or the scenarist, does it so ineffectively that we have no feeling of pity for the separated sweethearts. This is where the intermission came at the Forum, and I went out on the sidewalk and asked myself why I should not go home, for I was not interested in anything that could happen to the main characters. But when someone tooted his horn I went back to my seat inside and remained through some reels of production value until Dolores and Jack were carried off to jail. Then I did go home. I don't know what eventually happened to them. I don't care. I refuse to feel concern for such a girl or for a man who could love her. I missed the poignant love story of the book and the opera. In *Camille* Fred Niblo made me sympathize with the misfortunes of the girl until I condoned her action in leaving her squalid home to become the mistress of a man of wealth. In *When a Man Loves* no such sympathy was created, and without it the story had no value. Barrymore is a really great actor, but he is not great enough, nor is there any other actor in the world great enough, to make something out of nothing. As I watched him in this Warner Brothers picture I sighed for the Barrymore of *Jekyll and Hyde* or of *The Sea Beast*. I lamented that his great talents were wasted in such an inane part. Barrymore is regarded by the public as an actor and it wants to see him act. As a leading man with a classic profile he has paraded all his tricks and he should depart from such roles and confine himself to definite characterizations that give him opportunities to display some versatility. Some good, old-fashioned ranting would have been a relief in *When a Man Loves*. The Warners give the picture a picturesque production, although some of the great interiors are too mathematical in their lines. If no better story could have been secured it should have been done in color. Dolores Costello displays considerable acting ability, and Warner Oland and Sam de Grasse give their usual fine characterizations. But the picture is no credit to the screen and is a lamentable vehicle for an artist of the ability of John Barrymore.

* * *

"After Midnight" Cheap and Vulgar

ASERIES of close-ups of Norma Shearer is *Monta Bell's* latest contribution to the screen. When the camera backs up far enough to give us some other glimpses of *After Midnight* we find that it is a picture for which there is no excuse whatever. We have close-ups of Norma in every stage of activity from having a bath to getting drunk. We have a lot of close-ups of Gwen Lee, too, showing her doing everything from gargling listerine to dying. I thought the former would tie-up later

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with a scene showing that she had halitosis, but there was no such tie-up, leaving no other conclusion than that the gargling was included for its own inherent artistic qualities. When Gwen dies she lives up to movie traditions by closing her eyes, which is not the old established method of dying. In the opening sequence we are teased into anticipating a close-up of Norma scrubbing her teeth, but just before she sticks the toothbrush into her mouth there is a quick cut to a close-up of Gwen curling her eyelashes. Norma and Gwen are sisters. Norma is a tight-wad and Gwen a live wire. Norma laboriously saves one thousand dollars and buys a Liberty bond; Gwen gets a Liberty bond as a favor at a wild party, which makes Norma conclude that she is a fool. To prove it she gets soused. I have seen, or read, the same situation somewhere else, but can not recall just where. Lawrence Grey is the leading man. First we see him as a hold-up man who operates with a piece of lead pipe, which he forces Norma to buy for ten dollars. Quite properly she beans him on the dome with it, and quite improperly she takes him to her room after midnight to minister to the resultant scalp abrasion. The instant he comes to he falls in love with her and decides to go straight. I seem to recall that that also has been done before. They are going to get married, the fact being planted in a pretty love scene on the sidewalk in front of the display window of a furniture store, an ideal place for such a scene. As they stroll away Norma sees some baby carriages in another window and is embarrassed, still another incident that helps to establish the fact that either Monta Bell, as author of the story and director, or Lorna Moon, who wrote the continuity, has a splendid memory. Lawrence later sees Norma with another man and gets drunk and spends all the money he had saved to buy a taxicab. Norma previously had seen him necking with another dame, and reverses the debauch idea. She blows in all the money she had saved first and then gets drunk. Oh, it's a lovely picture, all right! When it is released, by all means take the children to see it. It teaches a great moral lesson: that it is quite all right for a girl to get drunk and kill her sister by forcing a car over a bank, for no doubt the surviving sister can find a Liberty bond in the drawer where her deceased sister kept her underwear. The only redeeming feature of the production is a fine performance by Gwen Lee, to whom goes all the acting honors. Norma is not convincing in any of her scenes. Even if the story had any merit, and if Norma's acting ability had been equal to it, her performance would have been ruined by the long parade of meaningless close-ups of her. The atmosphere of the picture is disgusting.

If under the supervisor system M.-G.-M. has to descend to such depths to find material for the screen, it is time Mayer was doing away with his supervisors and giving people with clean minds an opportunity to show if they can turn out some pictures with entertainment in them and which people can view without holding their noses. The only clean thing in this picture is Gwen Lee's gargling.

* * *

"Ritzzy" Is a Sorry Affair

WHEN It was released by Paramount the screen gave credit to Elinor Glyn for both story and supervision. When *Ritzzy* was released the screen gave credit to Madame Glyn only for the story. It was an amusing comedy that is making a great deal of money. *Ritzzy* is the silliest thing imaginable. Eliminate a clever characterization by William Austin and there is nothing left—no comedy, drama, nor sense. I refuse to believe that Elinor Glyn wrote the story as we see it on the screen, or that she had anything to do with the screening of it. She sometimes writes stories on trivial themes, but she makes them amusing, human, or alive. *Ritzzy* is tiresome, unreal and dead. Madame Glyn made a notable picture out of her *Three Weeks*. She made the screen version of her book and supervised every sequence, consequently we may accept that production as the measure of her screen mind. And the mind that conceived such a picture, or such an amusing one as *It*, could not have been responsible for a terrible thing like *Ritzzy*. No doubt the theme was hers, a trivial thing that required her entertaining touch to give it any value. As it reached the screen it is treated in a manner that emphasizes its triviality. The theme is treated seriously, lacking the literary touch that glosses its inherent unreality and makes it amusing to an extent that would make us forget its faults. In any picture the story is of less importance than the manner in which it is told. What *Ritzzy* needed to make it tolerable was the touch that Madame Glyn gave *It*, a touch of cleverness that made it a better picture than *Ritzzy* although the story did not have much more merit. In *Ritzzy* we are given an American girl who determines to marry a duke for the sole purpose of spiting her friends. Told with a sense of humor such a situation might get by, and it might be possible to retain for the girl a semblance of sanity. But as we see her she is a senseless little fool, totally devoid of a sense of humor. Until Paramount develops an ability to put some wit into a picture that needs it, it would please its patrons better if it stuck to slapstick and objective drama. *Ritzzy* gets off to a false start. Betty Bronson, as the American girl, gives a party at which James Hall, a duke incognito, is the guest of honor. We are supposed to be gazing on real society, but the hostess insults her guests and the guests insult the hostess. It is absolutely ludicrous, but not funny. The high point of asininity is reached when the hostess resents the desire of her girl guests to meet the guest of honor. No doubt Richard Rosson followed the script in directing the scenes, but as we see it the whole sequence is impossible. It needed a touch of humor to make it plausible. The thing gets more ridiculous as it proceeds, and not in one scene is any sympathy gained for the heroine, who remains a half-wit until the end. Joan Standing, sporting an extraordinary collection of freckles,

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gives a human interpretation of a girl in love with Bill Austin, to whom all the acting honors go. The great ability of George Nichols is lost in the part of the silly father of the silly girl. The chief merit of George Marion's titles is their punctuation, but no one on earth could write titles that would appear to good advantage in such surroundings.

* * *

Here Is One That Is Full of Blunders

ACCORDING to What Every Girl Should Know, a Warner Brothers production, there is a public office that most Americans do not know exists. It is "governor-general" of the state. Patsy Ruth Miller is trying to get her brother out of jail, and the "governor-general" writes her that he can do nothing about it. A title in this picture also reveals something new. It will be a surprise to those who compile our dictionaries to learn that there is such a word as "alright". The vitaphone apparently is not the only thing that Warner Brothers have discovered. Another bit of knowledge that I picked up when viewing this picture is that when you say you are going to the dressmaker's the apostrophe before the s is superfluous. And there were quite a lot of other things that this picture taught me, among them that Ian Keith needs a hair cut, that no legal procedure is necessary to confine children in an orphanage, that it is possible for a girl in such an institution to keep her hair marcelled, that it is quite the proper thing for a well bred girl to open another girl's hand-bag and read the letters found in it, and that when a girl meets a man in a store she is supposed to take his arm. *What Every Girl Should Know* is a very poor picture, so poor that it would be amazing if it were not so in keeping with the standard of so many that come from the same studio. Charles Reisner gave us *The Better 'Ole*, and for that picture I always will be grateful to him, but he displays a total unfitness to handle anything that demands the gentle treatment this other story should have received. Only in the closing sequence does he rise to any heights. Carrol Nye, Pat's brother, unjustly confined to prison, is liberated in time to attend her wedding, and the family reunion is directed with feeling and sincerity, being the only feature of the entire picture that has any merit in it. A title informs us that Keith has realized suddenly that he loves Pat, but it is not followed by a scene showing him registering the fact. Instead there is a shot of Pat selling a tennis racquet in Dyas's store. Every narrative title should be followed by something relevant to it. Reisner falls down in his treatment of scenes in the juvenile home. He resorts to the old fashioned idea that the attendants in such an institution are inhuman monsters with faces so hard as to make Buster Keaton look jovial by comparison. It was necessary to make Patsy Ruth and Mickey McBan unhappy in the place, but a director who thoroughly understood the drama in the situation would have shown the attendants as ordinary human beings with kind hearts, but powerless to relieve the harshness and heartlessness of the system they served. Reisner's direction makes it appear as if the orphanage staff inflicted cruelties on the inmates for the personal satisfaction it derived from it. It would have been a much bigger thought to have shown the staff human and the institution itself cold and unkind. But big thoughts

have no place in this picture. A title tells us that visiting day at the penitentiary came for the hundredth time. As there is but one visiting day each month the title would indicate that Nye had been in prison for more than eight years. Perhaps he was, but if such were the case I can't see why Mickey McBan did not grow a little during the eight years. The audience knows that Nye was innocent, but an insert of a newspaper heading shows that he had had a "notorious career". Warner Brothers display a positive genius for turning out pictures which display a total lack of genius in their treatment.

* * *

Brainless Bit of Screen Literature

WHEN motion pictures cease being just motion pictures there is going to be less discontent with screen entertainment. Even as recently as five years ago it was possible to do things on the screen that can't be done now. The last vestige of novelty has worn off. We have seen possibly every kind of interior that there is to be seen; we have grown used to all that costume designers can produce to intrigue us, and tricks of photography, double exposure, multiple shots, and things of that sort are old stuff now. We look clear through the extraneous materials that enter into the making of a picture and have eyes and mind only for the story. We are no more intelligent now than we were a dozen years ago, but all the intelligence we have is centered on the mentality reflected by a picture. Perhaps I can make a short cut to what I am driving at by using *Rough House Rosie* as an example. It has everything in it that the screen has outgrown and must avoid if it is to make progress. *Rosie* is a thoroughly wooden picture, one hun-



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dred per cent. movie stuff. I imagine that the wooden quality was planted in the adaptation by Max Marcin, a stage playwright who not yet has displayed any aptitude for the screen, although I understand he holds a position in the Paramount studio which permits him to dictate to those who have. The film moves along from one unconvincing sequence to another, without revealing that it had enjoyed contact with any real picture intelligence, without planting one definite thought, and without creating sympathy for any character in it. In her spoken titles Clara Bow is shown to be illiterate, and in her action she is planted as a roughneck. She spends a night in jail, being suspected of stealing a diamond bar pin from a "society" bachelor, but why the devil a bachelor should have such a pin Marcin doesn't make clear. She goes from the jail, where she made an instant hit with the bachelor, and we next see her making a fool of herself at a fashionable swimming party. Only in a movie could such a girl be admitted to such company. Later it is necessary to the story that she should be made to see how the society of prize fighters is much more desirable than that of fashionable people. She is shown at a party staged by an unexplained princess, and to have any story value the party must be one which truly represents life in the kind of society a princess would affect. It is more typical of life in the red light district, being composed principally of views of girls' legs and wives kissing other wives' husbands. It more nearly represents degeneracy than it does life in any stratum of society. There is a prize-fight which has no drama in it, for nothing hinges on the outcome, and after it is over Clara and the winner go into a clinch in full view of the thousands of people in the audience, a romantically secluded spot for a love scene. There are many other ridiculous things in the picture, but I have enumerated enough to illustrate my discourse. Not even a girl who rejoices in the dainty sobriquet of "Rough House Rosie" will embrace her sweetheart and kiss him passionately in full view of thousands of people. But even if there should be such a one, no love scene in a motion picture should be staged in such surroundings. A dozen years ago it might have been all right, but we long since have outgrown that sort of thing. Pictures by now should give the impression that some imagination had a part in their making. No story has any screen value unless it can convince us of its reality. *Rough House Rosie* does not contain a single convincing sequence. It is a perfect example of the kind of picture that should not be made. The adequate production and the fair direction of Frank Strayer are totally wasted on such a brainless piece of screen literature.

* * *

One afternoon I saw *When a Man Loves*, which took months to make at cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. That evening I saw *The Other Side*, which took six days to make and cost seven thousand dollars. In the afternoon I was bored; in the evening I was interested. For straight entertainment the big picture could not compare with the little fire-reel one. *The Other Side* was produced by Fred C. Epperson, who calls himself the Epperson Productions. In a measure it is a product of the much-abused supervisor system, but as Bart A. Carre, who supervised it, also was production manager, assistant director, technical director and casting director, as well as the chief comedian on the screen, its merits can not

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

IT HAS always appeared to us a strange and interesting fact, and one worthy of deep consideration, why a supposedly intelligent public, as we Americans claim to be, will with reckless stupidity advocate and indulge in the expenditure of millions of dollars per annum, under conditions which could only evoke a smile of ridicule or contempt from any thinking human whose ego will permit of the admission of just two facts:

First: That life is uncertain; and

Second: That two and two make four.

With no little justice we resent lectures and lecturers from abroad as the intrusion of a stranger; but no such claim can be laid to the criticism of a member of one's own household, meaning those who claim kinship under the same flag; and as such I write, and writing hope, that the frankness of my statements if unpalatable, may be weighed with the truth contained therein, and if some enlightenment results, who will object?

Of late some thought, much time, and more talk has been given to the question of economic cinema production, resulting only, as was shown in *The Spectator* issue of July the 9th, in an attempt to conserve the cost at the expense of the employees.

A very similar move was made some years ago, when the wild extravagances practiced by Life Insurance companies were exhibited to the world, and they retrenched by reducing the commissions payable to the agent, and "Pilate like," having ostentatiously washed their hands they continued and still continue, the crucifixion of the public.

Not the least of the oddities which confronts us, is that the very subject which forms the reason or excuse for this unnecessary and unintelligent expenditure, is one which few care to discuss, and none to learn, outside those who profit by this human weakness.

In advance, be assured that the economy of which we speak, refers not to the petty economics in your every-day life, nor any reduction of expenditure on those things which go to make life worth while, but on the contrary it refers exclusively to the paying of two or three times more than is necessary for investments made in the belief and under the assumption that these investments themselves are a saving and an economy.

The particular investment of which I speak is, "Life Insurance," and startling as it may appear, I can safely say without fear of contradiction, that there is scarcely one connected with the moving picture industry to-day who is not paying approximately twice as much as it is necessary to pay for the same insurance as he has, in the same companies as he is insured in. Moreover, it is doubtful if there is one who could not get back anywhere from twenty-five per cent to fifty per cent of what he has been overcharged by the companies.

AND THAT IS NOT ALL.

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be advanced in their entirety as a defence of the system. Ernst Van Pelt directed, and others in the cast were Florence Lawrence, J. Frank Glendon, James A. Marcus, Harry Northrup, Hazel Keener, Pat Harmon, Charles Gerson, Tom London, Jack Waltermeyer and Lucille Irwin. The photography was extraordinarily good and there were many exterior views of majestic beauty. Joseph B. Walker was cameraman. Screen art is going through the experience that all other arts have had: those who starve at it advance it most. These little fellows, who must rush to finish a picture before their bank-rolls pinch out, are doing more for the screen than the Laskys, Mayers and Schencks, with their millions. *The Other Side* is a thoroughly meritorious little picture, reflecting considerable credit on the many-sided Mr. Carre, the final letter of whose name has over it an accent which is beyond the mechanical ability of our type-setting machine to reproduce.

Not so, Mr. Beaton, note the accent—Carré.—Operator. Fancy that! And I've been avoiding its use! —W. B.

* * *

In the last issue of *The Spectator* there appeared this sentence: "In the motion picture business there are too many Jews given positions merely because they are Jews, and that is bad business." One good friend writes me that I should try to square myself in this issue because I am credited with an anti-semitic sentiment. Another man congratulates me upon having "given the Jews in pictures a wallop." Three Jews write me indignant letters asking me why I introduce race feeling into the present mix-up. I could write an article about German directors in Hollywood and the Germans would not resent it. I write about Jews in a perfectly legitimate way and Jews—only some of them, of course—get sore, notwithstanding the fact that what I wrote of itself contains nothing that should cause the soreness. Why are some Jews forever on the defensive? Are they hedged around with some divinity that makes mention of them being Jews sacreligious? If there be any person, Jew or gentile, who has read *The Spectator* consistently and has arrived at the conclusion that I harbor any ill-feeling against Jews as Jews I will leave him in undisturbed possession of his opinion. He would be a very small person, and I like to argue with big ones.

* * *

Some weeks ago I had as my dinner guest a well known Eastern writer who was securing data in Hollywood for a series of articles that will appear in one of our most widely read national magazines. He pumped

me, but would not believe what his pump brought forth. I told him of the almost total lack of a sense of courtesy in the screen industry's conduct of its business. I told him that at the moment B. P. Fineman was the acting head of the production department of the biggest producers in the business, a really exalted position; that I could write him an ordinary and courteous business letter that he would not reply to because I criticize Paramount pictures adversely when they deserve it. The writer would not believe that a man at the head of such a big business enterprise could be so lacking in ordinary business courtesy, so I proceeded to prove it to him. I wrote Bernie a pleasant little letter asking if I might have a pass to the Paramount lot, something I didn't want, but I couldn't think of anything I did want. It was a request that an executive might concoct a reason for refusing, but the letter was one that it would be inexcusable not to reply to. Bernie did not reply to it. I had proved my point, as the national magazine some time this fall will record. The funny thing about it is that the author had no difficulty whatever in securing one of Bernie's photographs to illustrate his article about the lack of business courtesy in the motion picture industry.

* * *

Perhaps Wally Beery is a comedian. I don't know. I have seen him in *Behind the Front*, *We're in the Navy Now*, and *Casey at the Bat*. In all three he does only what dozens of other players on the Paramount lot could do equally well. The parts are so asinine that all anyone playing them need do is to make an utter ass of himself. That that is all Wally does is not his fault. We know he is an excellent actor. *Casey at the Bat* might have



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been quite an entertaining comedy if it had not been bungled so badly. I saw the second half first and rather liked it, at least enough to sit the show through to see the first of it, anticipating some good baseball scenes. It is a baseball story, making reasonable my expectation that there would be some baseball in it. I wanted to see the drama of Casey's capture of the New York fans. All I saw of it was an insert of a newspaper heading. If I had seen the first half first I would not have enjoyed the second half as much as I did, which wasn't so very much. But I enjoyed seeing Zasu Pitts again after quite a long spell of not seeing her on account of her submerision in a Von Stroheim production. Von certainly can keep 'em off the screen. These Paramount comedies have made a lot of money. I can't understand why Paramount did not go after more money by making them so they would appeal also to intelligent people.

* * *

Various motives have been ascribed to me for my stand on the matters now at issue between motion picture producers and those who work for them. My open letter to Jesse Lasky in the last Spectator seems to have created extraordinary interest and several acquaintances have asked me just why I "have it in for" Lasky. Others seem to think I "have it in for" the Metro crowd. Nothing so unimportant as my personal feelings has any part in a controversy that is so important. I have not had much contact with Jesse Lasky, but what little I have had has been of the most agreeable sort, and I always have found him a pleasant fellow. I am not acquainted with Louis B. Mayer, but for Irving Thalberg and Harry Rapf I have a high personal regard. I have had considerable to do with them and have found them at all times most courteous and pleasant. For a short time I worked under Harry Rapf and have for him a genuine liking. My personal inclination would be to say only the pleasantest things

about everyone in the industry, but my personal inclinations are trivial things when the whole future of pictures is at stake.

* * *

The motion picture industry may be relied upon at all times to be diverting. Its latest comedy turn is its suddenly acquired longing for teams, George K. Arthur and Karl Dane, George Sidney and Charlie Murray, and a half dozen or so more. The only thing that the industry does not seem able to do is the only thing it should do. Its one mission is to produce stories. If a certain story calls for a team of comedians, well and good; put Arthur and Dane in the parts and let them go at it. The story should be the major consideration and we will never improve the average quality of pictures until it is. The star system has distorted motion picture art. M.-G.-M. can not make a greater mistake than imagining that the public wants to see Arthur and Dane together in a picture. The public wants only one thing—entertainment. The entertainment is provided by the stories, and they should be developed without thought of who is to play in them. Our producers persist in going at the business backwards. That is because they do not know what sort of business it is.

* * *

Casey at the Bat is a story of the Floradora sextette period. At that time there may have been four automo-

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biles in the United States, yet in one of the Marion titles Ford Sterling says, "His pulse is getting only four miles to the gallon." In another title Oscar, the bootblack on the Lasky lot who doubles as an actor between shines, tells a character that he "sure has 'It'", which is strictly of 1926 vintage. Views of the Polo grounds in New York show the old-time teams playing in front of the modern grandstands. After Jesse Lasky gets through finding out why his pictures cost so much he might try to discover why they are so silly.

* * *

In *A Million Bid* there is a scene which a title labels, "On the south coast of France." It shows great combers rolling up a wide expanse of sandy beach, the kind of beach that is formed only by the rise and fall of tides. The south coast of France is along the Mediterranean. There are no tides in the Mediterranean, no great combers and no such beaches as shown in this picture. Warner Brothers may be extravagant along some lines, but you can not accuse them of squandering money on technical advisers.

* * *

I am surer than ever that the trouble with two-reel comedies is that they are too short. The other night I saw a preview of Charley Chase's latest Hal Roach comedy. It will have to be cut down considerably to bring it within the required length—at least so I thought—but there is not a foot of it that can be cut out without lessening its entertainment value. It ambles along more slowly than most productions of its kind, but is amusing and interesting for its entire length.

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What You Should Know About the Law

Compiled by Attorney Roger Marchetti

ACCORDING to a recent decision handed down by an Amsterdam court, a performance given on board a liner entitles a composer or author to his fees, the law of copyright applying at sea as well as on land.

The Amsterdam court, at the same time, made two interesting decisions: First, that it was a public performance, and, second, that extra-territorial waters could be brought within the scope of national laws.

Accordingly, a German composer, discovering that one of his compositions had been played during dinner on board a ship, promptly claimed his royalties.

* * *

In a suit for infringement of complainant's copyright, recently brought to hearing in a New York court, it was found that there could have been no appropriation of complainant's ideas or literary form. It was charged by Joseph Grubb Alexander, Ernest R. Schayer, and Wilfrid North, complainants, that Sidney Howard had plagiarized Miss Lyon's (deceased) plot *The Full of the Moon* in his play, *They Knew What They Wanted*.

Judge Augustus N. Hand, after having heard the case and read both stories as published, together with rough draft of manuscript of the latter play, was of the opinion that events as set forth in both manuscripts where the incidents were similar, were not so uncommon as to give rise to any suspicion of a "steal". Miss Lyon's settings were on the order of Greek tragedy with characters of a highly romantic and tragic nature, whereas the characters in Mr. Howard's story had the homely philosophy of people of their type in this period.

The bill was dismissed with costs.

* * *

It may be interesting to know just how much rope the courts will allow imitators. Two Eastern nut companies recently clashed in court over their trade-marks. One company put out a trade-mark and slogan in certain colors and used it for extensive advertising purposes for several years. Another company evidently considered the idea as one that could not be surpassed and adopted one very similar, altering only the figure in the oval and changing one word in the slogan, using the same colors.

The defendant corporation claimed that it was purely accidental, but the court found "That the defendants have consciously followed the examples of the plaintiff and have adopted methods and practices similar to those of the plaintiff." However, the plaintiff was denied relief by the presiding Justice in the following opinion: "My view is that the defendant did consciously follow the example of his older competitor and did adopt

methods and practices similar to those of his successful rival. But I think he kept within his legal rights, although at some points coming dangerously near to crossing the line of legal safety."

This generous allowance on the part of the court, however, is a rare case, and not one to be considered as a precedent. Not only should the court protect the plaintiff in its rights, but the defendant, who has illegally attempted to imitate by unfair means his competitor's business, should be restrained, and the public protected from deception. It is not necessary that the attempted simulation should be identical to constitute an infringement.

* * *

Robert Milton alleges, in a breach of contract suit recently filed, that he was to manage Fox film productions this season. He asks six thousand dollars damages.

In a second suit, Robert Milton and Arthur Hornblow, Inc., jointly ask damages of twelve thousand dollars as commissions in obtaining screen rights to place motion pictures.

In a third suit brought by the two plaintiffs individually, Mr. Milton and Mr. Hornblow demand seventeen thousand dollars, alleging that this amount is due for violation of contracts regarding "various theatrical ventures" on the part of Fox.

* * *

Through recent Roxy decision, an action on the part of the Association of Moving Picture Producers to prevent projection-room showings for the purpose of press reviews has taken place.

Practical demonstration of its futility has been realized fully in the case of *Cradle Snatchers* (Fox). This picture was reviewed in the projection-room, with the result that the papers gave the picture none the best of it, and as a matter of fact, the audiences have proven it to be one of the best laugh features the house had held.

However, this action has effected a discontinuance of screening a picture prior to release since June 1st, thereby eliminating press showings.

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LETTERS

SHE DID GET HIM

Dear Mr. Beaton:

You complain that Miss Swanson did not get the same director for her *Love of Sunya* that was responsible for the old *Eyes of Youth* picture. Well, she did. It's a wonder you didn't get as many publicity bromides as I did on this point, while the picture was in production. They were proud of themselves for their perspicacity in engaging Albert Parker. Parker did all he could. The difference was that Clara Kimball Young wanted a director and Miss Swanson wanted a gentleman-in-waiting.

Having been able thus to correct you, the incorrigible Mr. Beaton, I feel like one of your Hollywood boot-blacks who proclaim "we are not stars, but we do shine". I have just arrived in this quaint city from England, an addition to the already excessive company of writers about the screen. But I insist that I have a just claim to fame. I am positively the first screen critic to admit never having seen Hollywood Boulevard when it was a horse-track. I can not remember the days when Bill Hart was a bathing beauty, nor when Jesse Lasky played the cornet for Mrs. Lasky in pink tights. When Beverly Hills was a rendezvous for cows and sheep I was six thousand miles away.

Until now I have been living in the civilized world, and while I cast no aspersions on the refinements of this motion picture colony I suggest that a few critics to whom Hollywood Boulevard is just Hollywood Boulevard would be all to the good. What is wrong with the mass of screen criticism here is that it's got Hollywood on the brain and has lost all standards of the outside world. Let me once hear a critic say he was in the bicycle trade in Amsterdam when Menjou was a Keystone cop, and I

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can drink my next bottle of Hollywood gin happily.

From all of which uncalled-for attack let me absolve the excellent criticism contained in *The Film Spectator*. May I hope that all the other letters you will receive about your little slip will be thoughtful enough to add this rider?

CEDRIC BELFRAGE.

THE BEST AND WORST

My dear Mr. Editor:

While I am in accord with your selection of twenty representative pictures—best and worst—I must confess I am curious to know why you select *Camille* among the ten best. First I must confess to a certain bias. *Camille* is the type of play that I detest above all others, primarily for its unreality.

The picture makes it even more unreal. Never at any time during the filming could I accept Norma Talmadge as a quasi repentant Magdalen. Hitherto she has been associated with the chemically pure role, for which she is eminently adapted. Neither could I imagine her as a pulmonary victim; she is too—what shall I call it?—"corn fed" to carry out such an illusion. This is quite outside of the fact that I fail to see any entertainment in the dying throes of a sex-ridden courtesan.

Presuming that the goodness of a picture depends primarily and principally on its entertainment qualities, I should be inclined to delete *Camille* from your list, and substitute the eminently low brow and eminently entertaining *Rough House Rosie*. Here we have a clever actress, who has won recognition solely on her own talents, giving a characterization, which might easily be made burlesque, with absolute fidelity, and without stepping out of character for a moment. True, the story is unsequential, though quite sufficient to sustain interest throughout. Moreover, in your list you overlook entirely the possibilities of entertainment from a comedy point of view, which is entitled to representation.

As to the ten worst, it is a subject too uninteresting for argument. Still, three pictures might easily be found as bad or worse than *Old Ironsides* and *The Yankee Clipper*, and are also entirely lacking in the pictorial and photographic qualities of the latter pictures.

Neither was I particularly impressed by *Seventh Heaven*, though I recognize its claim to a place in the first ten. Again, unreality and sentiment that fails to ring true when considered away from the glamour of the picture itself.

My personal choice for the Grand Prize, without any reservations, is *Chang*. Here we have a series of events and action, so strange to us as to seem unbelievable, yet never for one moment has one the least doubt that every situation and action is authentic and actually transpiring. This, I take it, is the true mission of the

screen, to create the impression of realism.

Perhaps it is this faculty, to turn imagination into reality, that makes the Germans such successful picture-makers. With apologies for this long screed, I remain your sincere well wisher in your thankless crusade for better pictures.

F. ELY PAGET.

WE STAND CORRECTED

My dear Welford:

Hey—you slipped up. You're caught. A most flagrant case escaped your corps of proofreaders. In your review of *The Rough Riders*, page 8, 10th line from bottom, left-hand side of the page, you use the word "accept" in place of "except".

Now, by all the gods, what means this abuse of the Queen's English? Forsooth and egad, it is prime time (the rhyme is unintentional) you were taken to task. Pray don't say it was unavoidable. The transgression is too glaring.

Personally, I like your journal so damn much I don't care how many mistakes you make in typographical errors so long as you keep up with the good work you are engaged in. There you sit, in your lonely grandeur—the only man in the country who dares to relate the plain, unvarnished truth about the motion picture business, and we can sit back and chortle at your daring. Boy! what a task you have. The most mis-used and abused industry in the world to-day; and you, the solitary and outstanding figure who dares to point out the glaring incompetence. Gee! You're a brave man; because I know your journal is not productive of dividends, and yet you've got the courage of your convictions to speak right out, no matter who it hurts—and all for the good and welfare and future of the industry. More power to you. May you live long and prosper.

PAUL GERSON.

Dear Paul:

Thanks for pointing out my mistake. As an exchange of courtesies may I point out that your "no matter who it hurts" should read "no matter whom it hurts"? —W. B.

WRITER AND DIRECTOR

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Two issues, and your plea, have made me decide that I may as well switch from the newsstand to the mailman.

Naturally, this means that I like your sheet; but you have one fetish that I do not, and to which I would like to take exception: that the director is a far less important factor in the making of a good picture than is

the writer; that with a good script, any old director can make a good picture.

In the creation of any work of art there are, it seems to me, two basic processes: conception and expression. As the conception can not be ours until it has been expressed, the second process is as essential as the first. A writer can not possibly give complete expression to a picture—he does not handle it in its final medium. He has indicated what should be done, true; but can an inferior mind realize fully what is thus indicated? I don't think so. No mind but one equal to that which conceived can give full expression to any conception. Unrealized, what is the worth of any conception?

And if the two are equal? Every true work of art is the expression of an individual; and the stronger the individual, the stronger the work. If our director has as strong an individuality as our writer, can he abide strictly by the latter's script? Of course not! His one desire is to give expression to himself. It is, of course, necessary that one mind hold the supreme authority, lest we get only a house divided; yet if one process is placed above the other, the submerged one can not realize fully its potentiality.

It seems to me obvious, therefore, that the writer and director of a picture should be one and the same person.

DUNHAM THORP.

PUTTING US RIGHT

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Apologies of your comments on *The King of Kings* in the current issue of *The Film Spectator*, I am taking the liberty of expressing my surprise and disappointment at several historical inaccuracies contained in your remarks.

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magazine has generally exhibited so high a grade of intelligence, that it can not but be a cause of regret, if not of disillusionment, to your discriminating readers to find you guilty of lapses that are inexcusable in one who assumes to speak with authority. The effect is not unlike that produced by the blunder which you yourself cite—the case of a movie gentleman who fails to remove his hat in a drawing-room.

You speak of the Gospel according to the Apostles. What you evidently mean, is the Gospel according to the Evangelists. Only two of the Gospels were written by Apostles—Matthew and John. Mark and Luke were not Apostles. Luke, a Greek physician, never even saw Jesus.

You lampoon De Mille for picturing Caiaphas and his political henchmen as alone responsible for the death of Jesus—a fact to which the Gospel records abundantly testify—and yet at the same time you find fault with the picture for not holding strictly to the Gospel narrative.

You refer incidentally to the burning of witches in Salem. Witches were never burned in Salem, nor anywhere else in America. A few of them were hanged. But the burning of these creatures was strictly a European pastime during the Middle Ages.

You say you hold no grudge against the French because their ancestors burned Joan of Arc at the stake. It was the English, and not the French, who roasted this young lady.

You say that the portion of the post extending above the transverse beam of Jesus's cross was not attached to the cross until after Jesus was nailed to it. How did you ever come to imagine anything like that?

CLIFFORD HOWARD.

WHAT PRICE NAMES?

Dear Sir:

Madame Louella O. Parsons, motion picture editor of the Los Angeles Examiner, indorsed, a few days ago, in her columns, Mr. Tom Terris's statements regarding the salaries paid by motion picture companies in Russia, where a good actor receives seventy-five dollars a week.

To-day, Madame Louella O. Parsons takes the cudgel against the "cut" in California, shields (of course) the 400 of Hollywood and declares war on unknown players "who might be groomed for big parts in order to bring about necessary economic reforms."

Cut or no cut, I hold that certain stars and leading actors, having obviously and repeatedly exposed their incompetency for the screen, should be warned to make room for better fitted players. One wonders how these former clerks and voiceless chorus girls ever got to stardom. They are imposed on the public who, after being cheated once, never wants to see again the pale phenomenon announced outside in electric letters.

It is absurd and untrue to say that the public must have "names". The

public wants a good picture, nothing else.

Undoubtedly we have in Hollywood a dozen stars endowed with undeniable talent. They earned their actual situation—as true artists do—by sheer ability and faith. But, we have also in this bombastic and artificial village, a good number of mongrels, toadies, dumbbells, quacks and would-be actors with "names", who should be invited to return at once to kitchens, stores, beauty parades, circuses and soda fountain counters, where they belong.

As for the "unknown player", allow me once again, Madame Louella O. Parsons, to enlighten you. He or she is not necessarily unable because unknown. You have probably never heard of Ivan Moskvine, of Polikouska, Eugene Klopfer, Rheinhold Schunzel, Rudolf Kleine-Rogge? They are nevertheless remarkable stage and motion picture actors. And have we not seen recently, a little girl, Miss Jeanet Gaynor (absolutely unknown six months ago) justly rewarded by her own effort?

Was the much abused public informed about this little girl before Seventh Heaven? No. However, I hear that Miss Gaynor's salary is microscopic compared to the salaries given to several other women of considerably less ability and charm.

I know certain actors "without names" starving in Hollywood, who are perfectly able to satisfy the public (they have proved it) for one-tenth of the amount actually paid to impostors.

To have a "name" is not always a question of talent. Very often it is a question of money.

JULES RAUCOURT.

TWO OTHER LISTS

Dear Mr. Beaton:

As per your suggestion in the last Spectator, I have compiled a list of the ten best and ten worst pictures of the year so far. To date I have seen

ninety-six movies—most of them bad—and many of which I have reviewed for the Hollywood Filmograph. My list is as follows:

THE TEN BEST OF THE YEAR TO DATE

The King of Kings (Spectator to the contrary, notwithstanding), Resurrection, White Gold, Camille, The Beloved Rogue, The Scarlet Letter, Mr. Wu, Hotel Imperial, Lovers, Children of Divorce. (I have not seen Seventh Heaven, or it would doubtless be near the top of the list.)

THE TEN WORST OF THE YEAR TO DATE

The First Auto, Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl, Tillie the Toiler, Altars of Desire, Framed, Bitter Apples, Dance Magic, Topsy and Eva, Sorrows of Satan, Notorious Lady.

And now I would like to add my opinion of the ten best performances of the year to date:

H. B. Warner in The King of Kings, John Gilbert in Flesh and the Devil, Dolores Del Rio in Resurrection, Joseph Schildkraut in The King of Kings, Louise Dresser in White Flannels, John Barrymore in The Beloved Rogue, Pola Negri in Hotel Imperial, Rod La Rocque in Resurrection, Rudolph Schildkraut in The King of Kings, Lon Chaney in Mr. Wu.

Incidentally, do you think it quite fair to repeatedly speak of Dearie as one of the worst pictures of the year, just because someone has told you it is bad, when you haven't even seen it? As a matter of fact, it is very pleasing, and the preview audience was quite enthusiastic.

The Spectator is improving with every issue. The only thing needed to make it perfect is your son Donald's column again. Here's hoping he will soon be well.

JANET ELSIE CLARK.

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FILM SPECTATOR

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No. 12

The Story of the Box-Office

By NORMAN WEBB

— 0 —

Producers should keep their hands off
production.

— 0 —

Directors to be of little importance
in future.

— 0 —

Properly prepared scripts will remedy
faulty cutting.

— 0 —

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STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

EDITOR'S NOTE.—The percentages after the pictures listed below indicate amount of capacity business they have played to throughout the United States and Canada. As soon as possible the foreign returns will be included.

In five or six instances, pictures are listed over 100%. This indicates that these pictures have broken house records all over the country and beaten the former house capacity business.

Production costs have not been taken into consideration, as this does not particularly matter at the box office. For example, there is one production listed at 77%, *The Lone Wolf Returns*, that cost less than \$45,000 to produce, while another production that cost over \$700,000, *The Greater Glory*, has dropped as low as 72%.

The pictures listed herewith include all feature releases for the past eighteen months that were of enough importance to get key-city runs and hold up fairly well. This naturally eliminates Westerns and second and third rate productions.

The road shows are listed in order, according to the biggest grosses and length of run. When road shows are released generally, they are withdrawn from that list and placed on the percentage list.

In the next Spectator will be published percentage columns showing the relative standing of supervisors, directors, writers, stars and featured players.

PRODUCTIONS RELEASED SINCE JANUARY, 1926

1 Big Parade.....Road Show	68 Blonde or Brunette.....82	136 Rookies.....74
2 Ben Hur....." "	69 Orchids and Ermine.....82	137 Telephone Girl.....74
3 Don Juan....." "	70 Strong Man.....82	138 Is Zat So?.....74
4 What P'ce Glory....." "	71 Classified.....82	139 Monte Cristo, re-issue 74
5 Beau Geste....." "	72 Slide, Kelly Slide.....81	140 Captain Salvation.....74
6 King of Kings....." "	73 Beverly of Graustark.....81	141 Michael Strogoff.....74
7 Seventh Heaven....." "	74 Hold That Lion.....81	142 Getting Gertie's Garter 74
8 Old Ironsides....." "	75 Tramp, Tramp, Tramp 80	143 Fig Leaves.....74
9 Wh'n Man Loves....." "	76 Duchess of Buffalo.....80	144 Across the Pacific.....74
10 Annie Laurie....." "	77 Evening Clothes.....80	145 You'd Be Surprised.....74
11 Wings....." "	78 Children of Divorce.....80	146 Altars of Desire.....74
12 Son of Sheik.....111	79 Dancing Mothers.....80	147 Wet Paint.....73
13 The Freshman.....110	80 Gigolo.....80	148 Flaming Forest.....73
14 Black Pirate.....105	81 Upstage.....80	149 Social Celebrity.....73
15 Flesh and the Devil.....105	82 Oh, What a Nurse.....80	150 Canadian, The.....73
16 We're in Navy Now.....103	83 Kid Boots.....80	151 Vanishing American.....73
17 Kid Brother.....102	84 Tin Gods.....79	152 Let's Get Married.....73
18 Tell It to Marines.....100	85 Bat.....79	153 One Minute to Play.....73
19 Merry Midow.....100	86 Show, The.....79	154 Brown of Harvard.....73
20 Stella Dallas.....100	87 Rough House Rosie.....79	155 Jim, the Conqueror.....73
21 It.....99	88 It Must Be Love.....79	156 Eagle of the Sea.....73
22 La Boheme.....96	89 Twinkletoes.....79	157 Underst. Heart, The.....73
23 For Heaven's Sake.....96	90 Gr. Duchess and Wtr. 78	158 Blackbird, The.....73
24 Night of Love.....95	91 Senorita.....78	159 Nell Gwyn.....73
25 Camille.....94	92 Tin Hats.....78	160 Sea Tiger.....73
26 Behind the Front.....94	93 Waning Sex.....78	161 Just Another Blonde.....73
27 Volga Boatman.....93	94 Knockout Reilly.....78	162 Mlle. Modiste.....73
28 Sea Beast.....93	95 Priv. Izzy Murphy.....78	163 Venus of Venice.....73
29 Bardeleys.....92	96 Stranded in Paris.....78	164 Tender Hour.....72
30 The Better 'Ole.....91	97 Subway Sadie.....78	165 Don Juan's 3 Nights.....72
31 Temptress.....91	98 Ella Cinders.....78	166 Prince of Tempters.....72
32 Annie Rooney.....91	99 Syncopating Sue.....77	167 Into Her Kingdom.....72
33 Quarterback.....91	100 Affair of Follies.....77	168 Three Hours.....72
34 Winning Barb. Worth 90	101 Taxi Dancer.....77	169 White Gold.....72
35 Dark Angel.....90	102 Red Mill.....77	170 Afraid to Love.....72
36 Missing Link.....90	103 Demi-Bride.....77	171 Johnny, Get Hair Cut 72
37 Four Horsemen, reis. 90	104 Lone Wolf Returns.....77	172 Masked Bride.....72
38 L. Windemere's Fan.....90	105 Faust.....77	173 Don't Tell the Wife.....72
39 Mr. Wu.....89	106 Popular Sin.....77	174 Aloma of South Seas.....72
40 Mare Nostrum.....89	107 Padlocked.....77	175 What Happ'd to Jones 72
41 Fine Manners.....88	108 Summer Bachelors.....77	176 Midnight Sun.....72
42 Eagle.....88	109 Wolf's Clothing.....77	177 Blonde Saint.....71
43 Kiki.....87	110 Cradle Snatchers.....76	178 White Black Sheep.....71
44 McFadden's Flats.....87	111 Tillie, the Toiler.....76	179 Lady in Ermine.....71
45 Scarlet Letter.....86	112 Sally, Irene and Mary 76	180 Wilderness Woman.....71
46 Chang.....86	113 Paradise for Two.....76	181 Bluebeard's 7 Wives.....71
47 Sorrows of Satan.....85	114 Third Degree.....76	182 Cabaret.....71
48 Metropolis.....85	115 Rosie O'Grady.....76	183 My Official Wife.....71
49 Unholy Three.....85	116 Say It Again.....76	184 Waltz Dream.....71
50 Three Faces East.....85	117 Koshier Kitty Kelly.....76	185 Love 'Em, Leave 'Em. 71
51 Three Bad Men.....85	118 Variety.....76	186 You Never Know Wom. 71
52 Valencia.....85	119 Show-Off.....76	187 Mike.....71
53 Campus Flirt.....85	120 His People.....76	188 Frisco Sally Levy.....70
54 Ace of Cads.....85	121 Loves of Sunya.....75	189 Ankles Preferred.....70
55 Beloved Rogue.....85	122 New York.....75	190 Wedding Bills.....70
56 Irene.....85	123 Sparrows.....75	191 Return of P. Grim.....70
57 Resurrection.....84	124 Let It Rain.....75	192 Blind Alleys.....70
58 Cohns and Kellys.....84	125 Battling Butler.....75	193 Fast and Furious.....70
59 The Unknown.....84	126 God Gave Me 20c.....75	194 Little Journey.....70
60 Casey at Bat.....84	127 So This Is Paris.....75	195 Blind Goddess.....70
61 Men of Steel.....84	128 Sandy.....75	196 Devil's Circus.....70
62 Rough Riders.....83	129 Amateur Gentleman.....75	197 Cheerful Fraud.....70
63 Hotel Imperial.....83	131 Just Suppose.....75	198 The General.....70
64 Mantrap.....83	130 Forever After.....75	199 Special Delivery.....70
65 The Midshipman.....82	132 Lost at the Front.....75	200 Ransom's Folly.....70
66 Torrent, The.....82	133 Reckless Lady.....74	201 Infatuation.....70
67 His Secretary.....82	134 Great Deception.....74	202 Long Pants.....70
	135 Lovers.....74	

country, they shortly will be withdrawn from the road show class and placed on the percentage list.

Of all the road shows, *Seventh Heaven* is probably the most remarkable, for several reasons: First, because its production cost was not too high; second, because it has no big star names in the cast; and third, because it is building so rapidly at the box office. It is of special interest to note that *Seventh Heaven* is Frank Borzage's first big success since *The Lady*, starring Norma Talmadge, which he directed four years ago for Joe Schenck. The trade shows of *Seventh Heaven*, in London, Paris and Berlin, have been so successful that this picture promises to duplicate its success abroad.

On the other hand, *Old Ironsides* seems to be the biggest flop among the road shows. With its gigantic production cost and very short runs all over the country, it is no wonder that *Jesse Lasky* wants to cut salaries. This is the second road show flop from *Paramount* this season, the other being *The Rough Riders*. But since the latter's production cost was only half of the former, it is not such a black eye to the *Paramount* organization.

Beau Geste, which has held fifth among the road shows, is the real life-saver among the *Paramount* road shows. Although this production was filmed on the California desert, credit must go to the *Famous Players'* Eastern studio, which sponsored the production, and especially to *Walter Wanger*, the originator; *William Le Baron*, the supervisor; *Herbert Brenon*, the director, and *Paul Schofield*, the scenarist.

Evidently the *Ben Schulberg* regime at the Western studio is much more successful with program pictures than with road shows, and especially the series starring *Beery-Hatton*, *Clara Bow*, *Adolphe Menjou*, and *Bebe Daniels*.

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It is especially interesting to note star name. Since *Don Juan*, *Beau Geste* and *Annie Laurie* are now being office successes have at least one big released generally throughout the

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HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, AUGUST 6, 1927

IN THE NEXT SPECTATOR

Norman Webb's department, "The Story of the Box Office," which begins in this number, will in the next Spectator reveal the box office rating of supervisors, writers, directors, stars, and featured players. His tables will give you at a glance just how the public during the past eighteen months has received the individual efforts of those who make our pictures. Norman Webb does not guess at things; he lets his percentage columns tell their own story. He and The Spectator for the past year have been co-operating in developing the most elaborate system ever devised to place before the motion picture industry the exact value in dollars and cents that its prominent people are to it. The rating of the different individuals is established by a compilation of box office returns received from all over the world.

* * *

The Big Banquet at the Biltmore

UNFORTUNATELY my invitation to the Biltmore banquet did not arrive, therefore I can not base any comments on first hand knowledge of what transpired at it. In any event, I would not be able to get such comment in this Spectator, which had to be in type the morning after the love feast, and even if the Academy had not forgotten to ask me I would not have sat up all night to write about it. At my leisure I will sift the reports that come to me and comment on them in the next Spectator. I do hope the Academy will not think that I am put out over its failure to invite me to eat up some of its funds. Really, I am flattered immensely by the incident. Representatives of all other film papers, all of which continue to publish only by grace of the advertising of producers, were invited, as well as the representatives of the dailies, which must treat pictures leniently to protect their picture theatre advertising. I feel that the fact that The Spectator was the only paper not on the invitation list is a tribute to its inde-

pendence, and is the industry's formal recognition of the fact that even a good dinner could not influence its views. It likewise is the industry's acknowledgment of the fact that it does not want honest criticism of its methods. If anyone high up in the Academy had been possessed of a sense of humor he would have seen to it that I was invited. It would have put me up against it. I did not want to go, but I would have had to, so that it would not appear as if I did not want to hear both sides of the case. Knowing as I do the real story of why the salary cut was called off, I have derived considerable amusement from the contemplation of the adroit manner in which the producers used the Academy as a cloak to cover their retreat. I have not told the story in The Spectator, as I did not wish to interfere with the progress of the negotiations, but I will relate it in the next issue. Thus far in its career the Academy has been a stout friend of the producers, although it was not aware at all times that such was the case. There are five branches of the Academy. For four of them The Spectator has fought as valiantly as it could. It has opposed the contentions of but one branch, the producers. The Academy as a whole does not recognize The Spectator at a time when it asks all other film publications to be represented at a gathering. The only time that four members of a gang will not recognize a friend is when the man who dominates them is mad at him. It would please the producers to ignore The Spectator, and apparently they are strong

CONSIDER THE LILIES

Can a business man make pictures?
Or can a bullfrog sing?
Or can a wart-hog circle
Aloft on airy wing?

Each to his own endowments;
The sea hath its metes and bounds,
Nor can a dachshund travel
With the swiftly coursing hounds.

Let's not criticize too harshly
The vocalizing frog,
Or his contemporary beastie,
The unaesthetic hog.

And though their blah conceptions
May sometimes get our goat:
On the trip of evolution
They may have missed the boat.

Think of Shakespeare's genius,
Iscaiot's itching palm—
Can you reconcile the ocean
With the noxious bayou's calm?

The one transcends emotions
With its myriad varied moods;
The other, life's precedent,
O'er former glory broods.

Embalmed in ancient precedent
It garners moss and slime,
Croaks the bullfrog to the wart-hog:
"The production is sublime!"

But the ocean-wide emotions
Of sentient human hearts
Can derive small inspiration
From the bayou's ancient arts.

On our devious pathways upward
We demand a wider view
Than the bullfrog and the wart-hog
In the moss-grown old bayou.

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

enough in the Academy to make it do things to please them. But perhaps The Spectator was ignored because the Academy does not think it important enough to be recognized. If so, I wish it would write me a letter to that effect. It would be a good comeback, and I have sufficient sense of humor to lead me to publish the letter.

* * *

Producers Think They Are Supermen

ONE of the main obstacles to the institution of reforms that must come to pictures before they will become better, is the individual producer's conception of his own importance. We never will have better pictures until we have better producers. The men whose inefficiency has created the present situation will not view complacently the institution of reforms that will eliminate them, yet their practical elimination is necessary before the screen can improve its status either as an art or as an industry. I do not mean that our producing organizations must be rendered headless. There must be in charge of them men of great business ability. Some of our present producers have such ability. Schenck, who rose from a newsboy to what he is to-day; Lasky, who was an unimportant vaudeville agent; Laemmle, who was in clothing business; Mayer, who made buttonholes—these men could not have achieved their present fame and fortunes if they were not extraordinary individuals possessing ability that has been denied the rest of us. It is by the woeful inefficiency of these and other men with similar careers that pictures have been brought to the verge of bankruptcy, but to dismiss them as being entirely devoid of common sense is to leave unexplained the fact that they earned legitimately huge fortunes that we, their critics, envy. You first must argue away Joe Schenck's many millions before you can argue away the fact that he has something to think with. But in acquiring the millions through the exercise of his business shrewdness, Joe acquired a conviction, which, when multiplied by the number of other producers, has brought the screen industry to its present pass: he convinced himself that it was not his commercial sense that made him successful; that it was his God-given artistic gifts, his ability to judge story value, to pick actors, to say what should compose a motion picture. Despite the fact that it has been proven both financially and artistically that our present producers know nothing about making motion pictures, getting them to accept the proof is going to be the greatest obstacle to the screen's emancipation. During the past few weeks there has been brought to light in Hollywood an amazing array of facts which reveal the utter incompetency of the producers, yet during all that time they have been bowing and smiling, and have been unbending graciously to give ear to their employees; and expressing through the newspapers their appreciation of the charming time they were having in the Biltmore conferences. It has been a spectacle to make the gods laugh. A man's sense of humor diminishes in the degree that the sense of his own importance rises; our motion picture millionaires are wholly egotistical, hence they have no sense of humor and could not appreciate the delicious comedy they were staging. Both on the screen and on Wall Street they were indicted for incompetency, and at the Biltmore they assembled their cohorts about their feet and jovially enquired, "What is this thing that

we are guilty of?" Never for a moment did they appear chastened, nor reveal by the straightening of a smile that they were on trial after they had been found guilty. How they emerge from the conferences I do not know at this writing, but that the sense of their own infallibility has been lessened in the slightest degree I do not for one moment believe. Before he entered the conferences Joe Schenck was convinced that he was a great judge of screen literature. I am confident that he came from them with that conviction undisturbed. And the same goes for all the rest of them, despite the fact that if they knew anything whatever of screen literature the conferences would not have been held.

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Also They Think They Know Stories

OFFICERS of a manufacturing company need not know anything of the process by which its product is made. John B. Miller, president of the Southern California Edison Company, a concern so big that it has under way the most gigantic construction proposition ever undertaken in the world, would not recognize a kilowatt if one perched on the corner of his desk. He knows nothing about electricity. But he knows men, and has assembled in his organization some of the best electrical engineers in the country. He pays them to make electricity and leaves them alone while they are making it. The man at the head of his public relations department, really the selling department, knows nothing about electricity. All he knows is how to get people to buy it, and he does not concern himself with its making. Louis B. Mayer, Jesse Lasky, Joseph M. Schenck, Sol Wurtzel—I could go all the way down the list—know nothing whatever about how a picture should be made, but there all their resemblance to John B. Miller ceases. They think they know all about it. As a result of this obsession they have been called on the carpet by Wall Street and lectured upon getting the motion picture industry into an almost hopeless mess. If as they enter Wall Street they pass a man emerging from it with a great many millions of dollars under each arm, and with bankers trotting after him trying to get him to take more, they will discover if they look closely that the man is John B. Miller, who is wise enough to know just where his knowledge of his own business ceases. Not only do our big producers know nothing about making pictures, but they have not sense enough to hire executives with such knowledge. They have people on their pay-rolls who know the manufacturing end of the business, but they are not allowed to exercise their knowledge. Even under a strictly reformed regime there would be a place in pictures for the Laskys, Schencks and Mayers if they could be made to see their limitations. They are needed to handle the big financial problems, and in that capacity could be of value to the industry. But as long as they cling to their present conviction that they know pictures, just so long will the business be as crazy as it is now. Six months or so ago I very nearly became a producer for United Artists. Joe Schenck and I quickly settled all the preliminary points of the contract, after which I submitted synopses of three original screen stories, and was all het up over the prospect of being a big producer with a most distinguished release. If I know anything at all about pictures I know that each of the stories could be made into a picture with

great box office strength. But Joe passed on the stories himself. He said the first he read in brief synopsis form was "old fashioned". This, mind you, before a treatment was suggested. He could not grasp the possibilities of any of the stories, and could not present one intelligent reason for not liking them. I asked him to let me go over the stories with a trained literary man who knew something about pictures, but my request was not granted. Shortly after my aspirations were squelched Schenck gave the world his conception of real screen entertainment, *Topsy and Eva*, unquestionably the worst motion picture ever made. I am not claiming that my stories weren't rotten. Perhaps they were. But if they were, a man who knows anything about screen stories would have been able to give at least one sensible reason why they were. I am confident that Sol Wurtzel is so fixed in his conviction that he knows all about screen literary material that nothing on earth could change his mind. I believe the same is true of Lasky and Mayer. But the truth is that none of them knows the first thing about screen stories. If they did they wouldn't have heard from Wall Street.

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All Must Come to Perfect Scripts

ONLY by the ignorance of producers and their supervisors of the essentials of screen literature could the present situation have been brought about. They have taken this literary art out of the hands of literary people and messed it up until Wall Street roared and frightened them. Even then they did not reveal by anything they did that they knew what it was all about. They were as helpless in locating the trouble as they were in creating it. As I write this the conferences are still in progress and I do not know what will come of them, but before this Spectator goes to press there may be developments which I will discuss in later paragraphs. That the industry will benefit spiritually from an exchange of ideas and the contact of producers with their employees may be presumed, but I believe that the views of all parties to the conferences are too divergent, and their selfish interests naturally too antagonistic, to get on the same track and lead logically to a solution. Producers are too arrogant to yield what they consider to be their divine rights; the importance of directors has been exaggerated until they have lost their sense of perspective; supervisors are fighting for their existence in an industry that they only can harm instead of help; actors believe that the whole industry rests on their shoulders, and writers have starved so long that they can give utterance only to emaciated conclusions. Yet all these divergent forces are drawn to a common point in the hope that Wall Street can be appeased thereby. The most important people in the meetings are those that all the others will agree are the least important—the writers. There is not one activity of the industry that does not have its inception in the thought of an author. To the extent that the industry has wandered away from this truth has it become lost in the fog of inefficiency, extravagance and waste. The more quickly it gets back to it the sooner will all its ills be cured. Some of the greatest writers in the world have come to Hollywood to sell their brains to motion pictures, only to be appalled by the crass ignorance and uncouth arrogance they encountered. Pictures lost them, but could regain them if producers had brains

enough to realize their value. Nothing that can come out of the Biltmore conferences, nothing that producers can do to put the industry on a sound basis, can do any lasting good unless it be the single determination to have perfect scripts. As I remarked in the last Spectator, perfect scripts automatically cure every evil that the industry now suffers. When Louis B. Mayer was busy at the conferences, *Twelve Miles Out*, one of his pictures, went on view. There was not a shot of Betty Compson in it, although she received a salary of five thousand dollars a week for working in it. Does Mayer have to go down to the Biltmore and call the entire industry into consultation to discover how such a criminal waste of money is possible? Does he lack sufficient mentality to grasp the fact that if enough time had been spent on the script from which *Twelve Miles Out* was shot, the process of making it perfect would have revealed that the scenes in which Betty appeared had no place in the story; that they would have been eliminated before shooting began, thereby saving the many thousands of dollars that the crazy script was instrumental in wasting? The mere fact that the conferences were called makes me believe that no lasting good will come of them. The thought that they were necessary betrays a blindness too deep to be penetrated by anything that could be brought out at them. The object of them was to devise a plan to reduce the cost of production. Only perfect scripts will do that. They will do everything from attracting more money to the box office to reducing the force of men necessary to the operation of the studio planing mills. Lumber won't be used in sets that have been eliminated from scripts.

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Easy to Write Perfect Script

ONLY a moment's consideration of the importance of perfect scripts should convince even the stupidest producer that he need consider nothing else. We start with several facts that are granted: pictures themselves are on the down grade; they cost too much; overhead is high; studios are overmanned. The first fact may be divided into poor stories, weak continuity, unconvincing acting, faulty editing and inane titles. As we have throughout the world plenty of authors who can write good stories it seems logical to charge poor ones on the screen to the studio's inability to select its literary material, or to bring intelligence to bear on its treatment after it is selected. The natural tendency of a perfect script policy will be the development of authors who will be attracted to Hollywood and who soon will master the technic of writing directly for the screen. With the assistance of trained continuity writers they will submit their stories in correct form for shooting, as the novelist submits his manuscript in correct form for publication. It will be as easy for the screen writer to do this as it is for the novelist, or as it is for an engineer to design a bridge, or an architect to draw plans for a building. But your screen author will have to know camera angles, protests the director. He will learn them. But he will have to understand lighting. He will learn it. He will learn all that he needs to learn. It is ridiculous to contend that there is anything about the making of a motion picture that a supervisor or director can grasp, but which is beyond the mental reach of a brain big enough to conceive a story. Litera-

ture has its authors and the stage its dramatists. The task of the screen writer is simpler and easier to perform than that of the novelist or dramatist. In a novel the hardest parts to write are the descriptions. It is not necessary to write them in screen plays. The hardest task of the dramatist is to bring his characters together logically in the settings of the various acts. On the screen it is not necessary to do this as the camera can follow the characters anywhere. Literature is not starving for authors nor the stage for dramatists. It is unlikely, then, that the screen will lack its competent authors after it has made a place for them. They will write logical and entertaining stories and all of their logic and entertainment will reach the public. The scripts will be prepared in a manner that will permit every person connected with the production to know exactly what he is doing. The director will shoot the script as it is written, and when it calls for a scene to be shown in a medium shot it will be shot that way and not also in a long shot and a close-up. An able second to producer inefficiency in squandering money is directorial stupidity in throwing it away in "protection" shots. When we have perfect scripts we will have directors who know their jobs well enough to need no protection. A really capable director even under the present ignorant method of making pictures has no excuse for shooting every scene three times. Each scene appears in a picture only once and it should be shot the way it is going to appear. We have very few directors now who are sure enough of themselves to make pictures properly. The rest will have to learn, or adopt some other means of livelihood. Just as the perfect script policy will bring a lot of capable authors to Hollywood, so also will it bring into being a new crop of directors who will do to-morrow every sensible thing that our present directors say can not be done to-day.

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Director to Be of Little Importance

OF ALL the arguments against the importance of the perfect script the one that has the least merit is that it will curb the director, that if he be made to shoot a script exactly as it is written he will be denied the opportunity to express himself on the screen. Instead of this being an argument against perfect scripts, I regard it as one of the big reasons why we should have them. At present directors are not curbed in their expression. They express themselves three times in each scene, in a close-up, a medium shot and a long shot. They express themselves with characters and in scenes which do not reach the screen. They express themselves in from twice to ten times the footage in which their boiled-down expression must finally be released. Putting an end to such ridiculous excesses is the greatest benefit that the perfect script will confer on screen art. Up to date all that directors taken as a whole have demonstrated is that they do not know how to make pictures. Every time a director shoots the same scene from three distances he confesses to his own incompetence. True, he will find that his script calls for such shots, but scripts to-day are based on the theory that the director is incompetent, although script writers have no conscious thought that their work is based on such a theory. There is no more reason why two scenes should be shot when there is a place in the picture for only one

than there is why two windows should be constructed when there is a hole in a wall for only one. "But we want several scenes from which to select the best one," it will be argued. Exactly the same argument could be advanced by the window-maker, but as houses are constructed sanely he must make his window perfect in the first attempt. I'll grant you that we have very few directors who can make a perfect scene in one attempt, but that is an argument in favor of new directors, not a reason why the incompetence of the present ones should be indulged. If you viewed pictures as I have to, with the single idea of appraising them as works of art, you would be more conscientious even than you are now of how deplorable the state of the art has become. The condition has been reached because we have allowed directors too much freedom in expressing themselves; because we allow the scenarist, the film editor and the title writer also to take a hand in the expression. And what are all of them trying to express? Something created by an author. Then why not allow the author to express himself? What right have any of the others to try to express him? By attempting to they have reduced screen art to the level of the gutter, and by the freedom given them are sacrificing on the altar of their inefficiency many millions of dollars that belong rightfully to the shareholders of the companies for which they work. The power of expression must be taken from these people who so emphatically have manifested their inability to exercise it, and given to the only man whom logic points to as the one in whose keeping it will be exercised wisely: the author. Never will we have the products of this literary art made either economically or well until literary minds dominate its creations. There always will be some directors, possibly a dozen, whose abilities will make them figures of importance in screen art, but they will be notable for the masterly manner in which they express what was in the authors' minds. The scores of other directors will be unimportant people, with ability only to put on the screen what they see on paper. I do not blame directors for arguing against perfect scripts. Self preservation always has been the first law of nature. But another law is that what is inherently sound in any given thing ultimately will assert itself. That is the irresistible force that is pushing the director into the background.

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Many Improvements That Will Be Made

OPPORTUNITIES to ruin a picture in the cutting-room will not be so numerous when they are shot properly. The spectacle of a film editor giving his version of a story, and later of a title writer giving his, and an entirely new version of it, will be a thing of the past. Every scene and every title having its place in the script, the cutter merely will follow instructions—and there won't be any title writer, for no one on the lot would presume to change a word written by the author. It is agreed that H. L. Mencken is an authority on the English language. He asked me for an article for the September number of the American Mercury. I sent it to him and when the proof came back to me I found that one of my sentences had been altered by him. I wrote him that I preferred it the way I had written it originally and I received from him a letter in which he said he had re-

stored my original language. He did not argue the point; he still must feel that his change strengthened the sentence, but he recognizes that the article is mine and that I have a right to express myself as I see fit even in his magazine. So it will be with pictures. The editing, then, will be speedy, and as the takes will be chosen during shooting, the picture, properly titled, should be ready for its first showing a day or two after shooting ends. The shooting schedule will be prepared as carefully as an engineer's specifications for a bridge. Again every man will know exactly what he is doing. A man who had something to do with the making of Gloria Swanson's last picture in the East writes me that a player was brought from Hollywood, was on the pay-roll for thirteen weeks, and all we see of him in the picture could have been shot in part of one day. There will be no more of that when we have perfect scripts. The saving in salaries will be enormous, but even so, the salaries will amount to a greater percentage of production cost than they do now, on account of the tremendous saving there will be in all other directions. Only sets that appear on the screen will be erected, making it possible to reduce studio staffs. Perfect scripts will eliminate supervisors almost entirely. There will be exceptions. Eric Pommer, although I think he made a very poor picture out of *After Midnight*, always will be a big figure, for he has an extraordinary picture mind and can guide even the best authors and directors towards better productions. But he will have to become efficient and spend his time on scripts before shooting begins, and not after, something, for all I know to the contrary, he may be doing now. But those supervisors who ruin so many pictures now will disappear from Hollywood. The scripts will contain carefully drawn characterizations and we will have, as a consequence, real people on the screen instead of the sticks who swarm upon it now. There will be much more acting that is acting than we see at present. And perfect scripts will confer another boon on pictures: they will tend to remove from it the close-up curse. No writer would be ass enough to include as many close-ups as directors and film editors give us now because they lack sufficient intelligence to tell a story capably without them. But as economy is the all-absorbing topic in film circles now, the fact that only by having perfect scripts can we have economically made pictures is the important matter. The artistic improvement of pictures would be incidental. Like the eight-hour day and the standard forms of contracts, perfect scripts are inevitable. Those who say all three, or any one of them, can not be made to fit screen conditions do not know what they are talking about. Such people, however, constitute a large proportion of the population of Hollywood, and we must get rid of them before pictures will come into their own.

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Extravagance of Buying a Name

ONE extravagance that Mr. Lasky might ponder over is the habit he has of paying enormous salaries to people whose fame is confined to Broadway, his assumption being that if they are called by their first names in the Lambs Club the people of Walla Walla are craving their presence on the screen. Take Eddie Cantor as an example. He has a following in New York and it must take a tidy salary to bring him to Hollywood. If he

possessed qualifications as a screen comedian, and if Paramount had a part that only he could play, it would be all right for Lasky to overlook the many comedians who already have their homes established here, and secure Cantor's services. But as far as I can judge Cantor by what I have seen him do on the screen he is not half so funny as any one of a score of slapstick comedians who always bore me, and can not be included in the same thought with at least fifty of our legitimate comedians. Of course, Cantor may have more ability than he has been permitted to display thus far in his career as a Paramount star. Occasionally, perhaps, a sillier picture than *Special Delivery* may be produced, but it is so seldom that it can not be recalled without a severe mental struggle. It is obvious, therefore, that the services of Cantor are secured at great expense in the mistaken idea that his name will attract audiences no matter how trashy are the productions in which he is presented. That it is a fraud on the public does not seem to occur to anyone. When whatever pulling power his name has is ruined by the pictures in which he is starred another name can be secured and the same trick worked again. When Paramount allows clever people to write clever comedies and puts clever people in them, it need not worry about big names, for it would not be long before such offerings drew audiences because they were Paramount comedies. At present even Cantor, who has made two pictures, means more to an audience in Texas than Paramount itself, which has made two thousand. In all lines of business the name of a firm is its chief intangible asset; in pictures it means nothing whatever. Metro depends more on Karl Dane's name than upon its own to put a picture over. For all the hundreds of millions of dollars it has spent on production, Paramount has to bring a little known man like Eddie Cantor to Hollywood in the hope that his name will provide what its own name lacks: a reason why a person should see a picture. If from the first it had concentrated on its stories and had developed writers who could turn out perfect scripts, "Paramount" to-day would be the only word that it would be necessary to spell in electric lights over the entrance to a picture house. And the word would be worth scores of millions of dollars to its owners. To-day it is not worth as much as Jobyna Ralston's. When Cantor arrived here last winter and the press agents made much of the fact that he was writing his own story, I said in *The Spectator* that the story would be no good and the picture made from it worse. *Special Delivery* proves that my prophecy had merit. What story there is is silly, so silly that it would be sillier to make it the subject of serious criticism. Most of the picture is a succession of unrelated gags that lost their first bloom in pictures made years ago. There is an elevator gag that was a direct steal from something I saw so long ago that I can not recall its name. Having a piece of ice fall down Cantor's neck, causing him to win a black bottom contest in his efforts to dislodge it, is new. I'll have to give credit to Paramount for being up to date with it, for it is not more than two or three months since I saw it in another picture. That's snappy grabbing. When the story becomes serious it becomes asinine. Jobyna Ralston loves Cantor, but she is about to marry another man because he asked her to. That's the kind of story it is. I'd like to see Cantor in a real story. I'm curious to know if he can act.

"Mata-Hari" Is Notable Picture

ONCE the Germans get into the habit of putting into all their pictures as much real screen talent as is displayed in Mata-Hari they are going to do one of two things: they are going to capture the film markets of the world, or they are going to force Americans to make better pictures. Mata-Hari is an intellectual treat. It is notable for its near-perfection in every feature that a picture contains—story-telling, acting, direction, lighting, photography, and sets. The story is told with neatness and dispatch. It slows up only when by doing so it becomes more impressive, and it travels along swiftly when it should. The action is carried along by dissolves from one sequence to another. We see Magda Sonja, in her dancing costume, bowing from the stage to the audience which stands and applauds her with up-stretched hands. We do not lose sight of the clapping hands as they change to those of people standing outside the stage door through which she comes, dressed for the street. It is an effective way of bridging an interval without any lost motion. Miss Sonja's performance is a remarkable one. She reveals that she had a deep understanding of the part. The suffering of her lover drives her to distraction, but when she herself is sentenced to death she takes it without a quiver of an eye-lash, just what we might expect from a notorious spy who knew at all times that death was but one of the hazards of the game she played. Fritz Kortner gives a magnificent performance. He puts his part over almost entirely with his eyes, relying but slightly on facial expression. Seldom has it been my good fortune to see a picture so superbly directed. It contains almost everything that The Spectator has argued should be in pictures. The star is sentenced to death and she has her back to the camera when she registers her reaction to it. Fancy that! All we see is her head going up, her chin raising. The director was not afraid to shoot the backs of all his characters. His grouping is at all times effective, but not in one scene is it obvious that it is done with the position of the camera in mind. We do not see a character walking into a scene and turning to face the camera, an infantile trick which so many of our directors perform. In Mata-Hari all the points are not registered by close-ups of faces. Both in long shots and in medium shots the bodies of the actors are allowed to play their parts in scenes, one of the things I have urged so often. One very effective shot shows nothing but the backs of the two characters in it, and it is the index finger of one of them that puts the scene over. There is a reason for each such scene. In this one a character is seated facing a wall and the other leans over his shoulder. Anyone in the room could see only their backs, hence the director shoots it that way. An American director would have torn out the wall and shot close-ups of the men's faces, despite the fact that such a view of them was not possible to anyone. The man who plays opposite the star appears in the picture in a night exterior, wrapped in a big fur coat. We do not discover who he is until near the end of the sequence, when he enters his house and takes off the coat. By our American method of introducing our leading characters he would have paused long enough in his task of rescuing the lady to be shot in a close-up while he gazed at the moon. Mata-Hari is free from every movie trick

that we work to death. In importing this picture Walter Kofeldt has done a distinct service to Hollywood. The only thing in it that does not reveal the highest intelligence is the only thing in it that Hollywood contributed, the punctuation of the titles. It was so bad that one would have thought that the picture was made here if the rest of it had not been so good.

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"World at Her Feet" An Entertaining Thing

QUITE an entertaining little picture is The World at Her Feet, starring Florence Vidor and directed by Luther Reed. Reed has demonstrated before that he is at home with a picture of this sort, and its faults are more faults of the script than of the direction. Miss Vidor neglects her husband, Arnold Kent, to pursue her career as a lawyer, and his discontent with the life he is forced to lead is built up logically and convincingly. The star's characterization is consistent. She is shown as being expert in her law practice at handling other people's troubles, and when she has domestic troubles of her own she is equally as capable in handling them. She gives a good performance and I like her in it better than I have in anything since The Grand Duchess and the Waiter. But the acting honors in The World go to Richard Tucker and William Austin. Tucker, whom I always have seen previously in serious roles, has comedy opportunities in this picture and avails himself of them quite delightfully. Austin's growing popularity as a comedian was shown when the audience of which I was a member began to laugh as soon as he appeared on the screen and before he had done anything to provoke it. He is alone on the screen as a damn fool Englishman and never fails to make an impression. I never saw Kent before. He has an easy way about him that is pleasing, and is a happy choice to play opposite Miss Vidor. When a picture has as much cleverness in it as there is in this one it makes me wonder why it does not go all the way in that direction and be free from the little faults that detract from it. David Torrence, a fine actor who had almost everything but his presence cut out of the picture, is shown as the head of the legal staff of a railroad. He persuades Miss Vidor to join his staff, thereby establishing the fact that she is a corporation lawyer. Later the whole story turns on the fact that she is consulted on divorce cases, which corporation lawyers never handle. It was not necessary to show Torrence as attorney for a railroad company. The divorce angle could have been planted by having him ask Miss Vidor to join his law firm to handle the divorce cases that came to it. Kent inherits a fortune and promptly quits work, a poor thing for a hero to do. Although he is tremendously rich and his wife's practice has grown to great volume, she asks him to exchange a bracelet he bought her for a set of law books. It is ridiculous and was done only for the convenience of the story, as the bracelet had to crop up later in the possession of Margaret Quimby, who fills a small part quite acceptably. There were plenty of ways of getting the bracelet back to Kent without dragging in the law books, which Miss Vidor was able to buy on her own account. Tucker calls on Florence at her home to consult her about getting a divorce, and although a title strains itself to make the action seem reasonable it fails of its purpose, for such a thing simply

is not done. Another bit of pure movie stuff is the effort to leave the hero unstained by giving him a title explaining to Tucker's wife that he has called on her in her boudoir merely to tell her that it's all off between them. It would have been better to have shown him as a bit devilish right up to the final clinch, for the story made it reasonable for him to play around more or less. A spoken title has the word "okay" in it. As I pointed out once before in *The Spectator*, that is the height of silliness. There is no such word. A man might write o. k. that way in a spirit of facetiousness, but how under the sun must he speak it to justify its being spelled that way? But it is a nice little picture. It had many opportunities to be off color, but Reed kept it clean and amusing. We have to thank him for that.

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Jannings Is Superb In Too-Drab Picture

THE opening sequences in *The Way of All Flesh* are done splendidly. They are acted admirably and serve to plant in an entertaining and mildly amusing manner just what the story calls for: that Emil Jannings has a happy home life, that he loves his wife and children and is a kind and indulgent husband and father; that he has a position of trust and is a man of exemplary integrity; that he is fond of clean amusement—in short, that he is a decent, contented American citizen. From these happy scenes there is a gradual transition to a dull note, a note which the picture strikes and holds with monotonous tenacity. The greater part of the production is an individual sorrow done in monotone. It would have been a more entertaining picture if there had been a suggestion of a bright streak, no matter how narrow, running through the drabness. I do not mean that there should have been comedy relief. God forbid! In several scenes a note of relief could have been struck without departing from the spirit of the story. For instance, Jannings, as an old and broken man, is shown peddling hot chestnuts on cold, winter streets. There are hundreds of pedestrians among whom he moves, but he never makes a sale. The mere fact that a man with such a past had to sell chestnuts on the streets contributed all the pathos that was necessary to the scene. To have shown him making a few sales would have relieved the drabness without lessening in any way the scene's inherent appeal. I am of the opinion that Jannings's physical reaction to his sorrows is overdone. I had the feeling as I watched the picture that I could have felt sorrier for him if he had stood up more bravely under the blow that fate had dealt him. His rounded shoulders and his shuffling gait almost got on my nerves. In the final sequence outside his home the expression on his face is that of a man whose mind seems to have lost its power to function. It makes the sequence less compelling. I am not going to waste much sympathy on a man who is himself incapable of being as sorry as I am for his misfortunes. If his mind has failed and he has forgotten his troubles there is no reason why I should worry about him. The whole closing sequence would have been much more appealing if Jannings had been shown in possession of both his mental and physical strength, impaired only to the extent that passing years and his great sorrow could not help affecting him. The picture swings too far in the other direction; it goes the limit in

showing him as a mental and physical wreck. But it is a fine picture. Jannings's performance is superb. What a master of expression he is! Purely as a vehicle for displaying the talents of its star *The Way of All Flesh* is beyond criticism. Victor Fleming's direction places him among the few really capable directors. In my opinion the bank sequence is one of the best acted and best directed parts of a picture that I ever have seen. Jannings's subtlety and his nuances, his extraordinary ability to talk with his eyes, and the ever-present impression of a sense of humor, make him magnificent in this sequence; and Fleming has handled it with consummate skill. Belle Bennett and that fascinating Phyllis Haver are excellent. Some day Phyllis's name is going to consume an enormous quantity of electrical energy. *The Way of All Flesh*, however, is practically all Jannings. I hope he remains in this country a long time and that he never makes a worse one. If Paramount can maintain such a pace we have in store for us some rare cinematic treats.

* * *

"Out All Night" Somewhat Weak

A FARCE can go farther in the extravagance of its assumptions than a straight comedy or a drama can be permitted to, but how far can a farce go? What liberties are allowed it? The humor in a farce is due to the exaggeration of effects and the distortion of incidents. Saintsbury defines the word farce as something that "deals with an actual or possible incident of ordinary life to which comedy complexion is given by its treatment." As I understand farce it must be based on something reasonable, deriving its humor from the unreasonable manner in which the reasonable thing is treated. The premise of a farce, therefore, should be as plausible as the premise of a serious drama. In *Out All Night*, the latest Bill Seiter-Reg Denny farce soon to be released by Universal, the main premise is faulty, consequently I can see no merit in the whole thing. Marian Nixon is a stage star—a most fascinating one, by the way—and Wheeler Oakman is the manager for whom she appears. She is too busy to sign a renewal of her contract and her uncle signs it for her, which made it as binding on her as it would have been if Peter the Hermit had signed it for her. But the whole farce is built on the assumption that a clause in the contract prevents her marriage for its duration. Oakman's persistence in trying to get Marian to sign it herself, and the absence of any title about a power of attorney held by the uncle, clearly establish the fact that the contract is not a binding one, yet all the action of the farce is a succession of efforts to circumvent it. For that reason *Out All Night* failed to interest me. It is the least meritorious of all the Denny farces that I have seen. One long scene is built on something as absurd as the contract. Marian starts for her apartment in an automatic elevator. She presses the button with the number corresponding with that of her floor. The elevator starts upward. Denny comes along and presses a button to bring it to the ground floor. Half way up with Marian it stops and starts down again in obedience to Denny's ring. Now automatic elevators do not work that way. The thing is impossible. When one starts upward all the button-pressing on earth will not make it stop until it reaches the floor it starts for. If such were not the case automatic elevators would

be impractical. To be one hundred per cent. funny a scene must be based on a funny idea that is plausible. If machinery be used in a comedy scene it has no value unless it acts like a machine and not like a comedian. The elevator could not have acted as it is made to do in this picture, therefore I could not see anything funny in incidents based on the theory that it could. I do not hold Bill Seiter responsible for the lack of entertainment in *Out All Night*. His flair for handling farce and light comedy is established as a fact, and when he is given anything clever to work with he can turn out a picture bubbling over with mirth. This time apparently he was handed an impossible script and had to call in some gag men to jazz the thing up. Almost everything we have tired of in two-reel comedies has a place in this feature picture. Only the presence of Marian Nixon in the cast saved the picture as far as I was concerned. She is an engaging youngster. Of course, Denny is all right. He is a really good comedian, but he has little chance in this picture. There should be more downright cleverness in a farce than in any other kind of picture. It is a minus quality in *Out All Night*, as it generally is in anything that's been out all night.

* * *

"Heart of Salome" Is Well Produced

THAT scores of close-ups are not necessary in a picture is demonstrated by Victor Schertzinger in *The Heart of Salome*. Fox has given the picture a beautiful setting and the director retains all the beauty of the scenes by not continually blotting out the backgrounds with Brobdingnagian reproductions of the features of his leading characters. There is one striking love scene between Alma Rubens and Walter Pidgeon that is shown almost entirely in a very long shot, the features of the players being indistinguishable in the distance, but all the value of the scene being established by the relation of the two to one another. He cuts to a medium shot at the end of the sequence, and does not commit the common crime of showing any part of the love scene in individual close-ups. Every reel of *The Heart of Salome* is a feast for the eyes. The exterior shots are particularly effective. We are used to interiors that strive to be artistic and sometimes achieve it, but we are not always as fortunate in the exteriors presented to us. The beauty of the outdoor shots in this picture is emphasized by the fine camera work of Glen McWilliams. At times, however, the lighting is more beautiful than reasonable. One scene does not lose its bewitching moonlight attractiveness even when

the moon sets; and before the moon slips beneath the horizon it manages to shed its rays on the sides of the characters farthest from it. No lighting is effective unless its origin be established by shadows as reasonable. A moon can not shine on a man's face and on his back at the same time, and when it sets it does not continue to shine on anything. The elaborate pains which the Fox technical men went to to show the moon setting would have achieved more in the way of realism if a change in the lighting of the scene had supported the moon's action. But on the whole *The Heart of Salome* is a delightful picture, splendidly directed by Schertzinger, and well acted by Miss Rubens, Walter Pidgeon and Holmes Herbert. It is a melodramatic story that contains nothing particularly new, although it is free from the threadworn conventionalities in its treatment. An example of this was a scene showing Alma receiving a telegram. The telegram is not flashed on the screen. We are pretty sure it is from Herbert, a master crook whose accomplice she is, and we find out that such is the case two scenes later when we see her with Herbert and when she refers to the message. What Herbert wrote in his telegram to call her back to Paris was of no importance; the fact of her return was the only thing that mattered. In a Universal preview which followed this feature picture a clause in a contract is flashed four times, although once would have been enough. The difference between the two pictures was that the one produced by Fox gave the audience credit for having some intelligence, while that from the Universal studio assumed that the memory of the audience could not stretch beyond a few hundred feet of film. The picture that makes the greatest impression is the one that leaves most to the intelligence of the viewer, something that producers do not seem to be able to grasp. Alma Rubens's photographic possibilities are realized fully in *The Heart of Salome*, but do not outshine her acting

EDWARD CLARK

Dramatist-Scenarist

"DE LUXE ANNE" . . . Joseph M. Schenck

"PRIVATE IZZY MURPHY" . . . Warner Bros.

"LADIES' NIGHT" Edward Small

"SALLY IN OUR ALLEY" Columbia

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abilities. Walter Pidgeon is an imposing looking leading man who knows how to act. I like him better every time I see him on the screen.

* * *

Forewords and the Close-up Curse

OCCASIONALLY we have a picture with a foreword to it. It puts us in the right mental condition to understand and enjoy the opening sequence, as well as to be interested intelligently in the way the theme, explained in the foreword, is developed. It is a sensible practice. That we see it so seldom is due to the fact that our production supervisors have so little picture intelligence. Too many of them think in terms of the stage, and the fact that our vocal plays have no obvious forewords persuades them that pictures should have none. The reason a stage has no explanatory foreword is because all the information that it would convey to the audience is given in the opening scenes. The first ten or twelve minutes of a stage drama are consumed with a lot of talk that virtually amounts to a foreword, for it plants the theme and acquaints the audience with the antecedents of the characters. A picture, denied a voice, can accomplish the same thing, in as far as the theme is concerned, in forty or fifty words. *Mata-Hari*, that intelligently produced German picture, starts off with a foreword that illuminates its entire course. *The Whirlwind of Youth* has a brief foreword which I approved when I read it, but the picture made me forget what it was, for all I could gather from the action is that if a young fellow keeps on kissing girls long enough it is inevitable that sooner or later he will kiss the one and only. Rowland V. Lee directed it. It must have writhed the soul of the man who gave us *Barbed Wire* to transfer such a purposeless story to the screen. I can not estimate the merits of Lee's direction of this Lois Moran vehicle, for it was hidden behind hundreds of the most absurd close-ups that probably ever were assembled in one picture. The intelligence that Lee displayed in handling *Barbed Wire* would seem to preclude the possibility that he can be blamed for the lack of intelligence in *The Whirlwind*. Ordinarily close-ups are a director's confession that he shot them because he lacked the ability to handle convincingly in one shot more than one character. Probably Lee close-uped everything for "protection" and Lloyd Sheldon, whom the screen presents as editor, used the close-ups instead of

action to tell the story. After watching the parade of close-ups for four or five reels it occurred to me to get some idea of just how many there were in the picture. I counted forty-nine while the minute hand of my watch was traveling from twenty-five after to half-past. That means that there were somewhere around six hundred in the entire picture. I know it is unbelievable, but there are the figures for you. Of the six hundred perhaps six were justifiable. It is one of the most stupid exhibitions of editing that ever made the screen ridiculous. But as our minds are occupied now more with economy in picture-making than with the modicum of art which they display, reflect upon the great expense that Paramount went to to ruin this particular production. I presume all the scenes were shot also in long and medium shots, as is the idiotic custom of directors. An enormous amount of film, which is time and money in celluloid form, was wasted to give room for the close-ups, which in themselves represented thousands of dollars sacrificed to the downright incompetence of those who made the picture. Lasky contends that the salaries of actors are too high. Yet he pays two of them for the time they spend locked in one another's arms while individual close-ups of them are shot. Lois Moran and Donald Keith are clasped in a tight embrace, but not too tight to prevent the cameraman cleaving them into separate close-ups. And that is but one of the crimes against art and economy which this picture commits. I do not know how long it took to shoot the picture, but I am confident that it would have taken only half the time if the shots that ruined it had been eliminated. While the Biltmore conferences were discussing screen follies I hope they considered the close-up one of the greatest.

ANTHONY COLDEWEY

Adaptations — Continuities

1. "Dearie" Roxy's Theatre
2. "The First Auto" . . . Colony Theatre
3. "Old San Francisco" . Warner's Theatre

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"Lost at the Front" Quite a Total Loss

OVERLOOKING the full potentialities of the market for a manufactured article by deliberately so making it that it will appeal only to a limited number of its possible purchasers, is in its essentials but one form of extravagance. If we spend one dollar in making an article we can sell only for a dollar and a quarter when without increasing the cost price we could have made it in such a way that we could sell it for a dollar and a half, it would amount to the same thing as selling it for a dollar and a half in the first place and throwing a quarter away. And throwing a quarter away is a violent form of extravagance. No man with any business sense would do such a thing. Yet motion picture producers are doing it constantly. I don't know how much First National spent on *Lost at the Front*, but it was a considerable sum. For this sum it made a picture that will make extremely young children and extremely undeveloped adults laugh a little, but which by no possibility has any appeal to people with matured minds. For the same amount, with the same cast and perhaps with the same director, it could have made a comedy that would have appealed to both adults and children, for undoubtedly it paid as much for the extremely fatuous attempt at a story as something with some sense in it would have cost. George Sidney is more than a comedian. He has a lively sense of humor and in addition a deep human strain that allows him to put real feeling in such scenes as demand it. It is a matter of no importance that Charlie Murray's comedy makes no appeal to me; it appeals to millions of picture patrons, so there must be merit in it. Sidney and Murray compose a team that could make the whole world laugh if they were provided with a story that had real humor in it. But First National puts them in a vehicle so inept that none but morons could derive any entertainment from it. By giving the story a semblance of coherency scores of millions of discerning people could have enjoyed it, and at the same time those who see virtue in it as it is now would have been pleased even more with it. Even if its producers made the picture with strict regard for economy, which, of course, they didn't, it was a wanton bit of extravagance to so limit its appeal. We have had many comedies to which the same remarks apply: *Behind the Front*, *We're in the Navy Now*, *Tin Hats* and others of the sort. The first two made a great deal of money, which in no way diminishes the force of my contention. I am not interested in how much money such comedies made. My concern is for how much more they would have made

if they had been richer in comedy that would have made them popular with intelligent people without lessening their popularity with unintelligent people. Perhaps it is because the iniquities of the others has been glossed by the time that has elapsed since I saw them, but as at the moment of writing I am fresh from *Lost at the Front* I think it is the most hopeless thing I ever saw, considering the kind of thing that it was supposed to be. No doubt the people on the First National lot would be able to explain it. "Oh, well, you see," the explanation would run, "we must make them for the audience. Can't get 'em too highbrow, you know." But the true explanation would be that *Lost at the Front* is a true expression of First National's comedy sense. Every one connected with the picture did his level best to turn out a comedy that the whole world would applaud, and its lack of cleverness is the gauge by which we may measure the lack of ability in the producing organization. Talk of "making them for the audience" is arrant rot, advanced only as an alibi. It is so with the other so-called comedies which I have mentioned. Under the systems by which the studios turn out their comedies such trash as *Lost at the Front* and the others are all that we could expect. I do not doubt that its creators think this First National offering is exceedingly funny. They clock childish laughs at a preview and interpret them in terms of adults because such interpretation is most soothing to their ego. When one takes into consideration all the wit and humor that are available in the world, all the brilliant brains that might be enlisted in the cause of comedy, he can but lament afresh the screen's total disregard of them. Instead of brilliant writers who could supply connected stories brimming over with fun, we have "comedy constructors" whose ideas of humor are as ghastly as the products of coffin constructors.



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Harking Once More to Punctuation of Titles

OFFERING the same specious excuse that they do for their still-born comedies, producers claim that ignorant punctuation of titles assists people of little education to read them more readily. At a dinner party the other night I dropped into a seat beside one of our few really educated title-writers. He opened conversation by telling me that he was glad to see that I had abandoned my campaign for the correct punctuation of titles, for it was something that could not be adopted without detriment to the screen. With a logic that I was too content with my dinner to combat he proceeded to explain to me that if I were familiar with the art of title-writing I would know that a strict adherence to the established rules of punctuation would work a hardship on the people in the audience who had little education. For them, he explained, it was necessary to supplant commas with dashes and omit capital letters in order that there would be nothing in the titles to divert their eyes from the words. He illustrated his contention by writing a sample title on the back of a golf score-card. He wrote it this way: "Sally was a bright girl—she was in love with Tom—the town electrician." At his request I aroused energy enough to demonstrate how I would punctuate it: "Sally was a bright girl. She was in love with Tom, the town electrician." He smiled indulgently. Then he argued that by separating the words by dashes the moron could catch their meaning at a glance, whereas by my system it would take him longer to understand them. As I had eaten myself into a state of stuffed ecstasy, which was enhanced by the hostess's permission for me to light my pipe, I was in no condition to argue the matter and allowed my title-writing friend to retire from the field victorious. But let us see. No matter how a title be punctuated, a moron, to be able to read it, must be able to read. How did he learn how to read—from a text book, or from screen titles? From a text book, of course. The vast majority of people who attend picture houses do at least a little reading of newspapers, magazines, or books that please their fancies. A safe majority of them do still more reading. Everywhere else except on the screen they would find the words quoted above punctuated as I punctuate them. Nowhere except on the screen would they find them punctuated as the title-writer punctuates them. The eye of the moron, therefore, is trained more to catch the meaning at a glance when the title is punctuated properly than when it is punctuated improperly. The educated person would not be handicapped by the incorrect punctuation, for he could catch the meaning by a glance at the words, but the moron, finding the words not set forth as he has been used to seeing them every other place, would be confused by the departure from the usual, and he would have to study the title to get its meaning. The guides that assist him in all other reading would be missing. The truth, of course, is that the title-writer, with whom I refused to argue on a full stomach, does not know how to punctuate, and, like the producers who do not know how to make comedies, has to fall back on the old one about getting down to the level of the audience. It is not to his discredit. He can write good titles, and no doubt his secretary could punctuate them properly if he would allow her to. One of the chief duties of my secretary is to fill

OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS

IN THE last issue of *The Spectator* we made a broad statement that, "scarcely one connected with the moving picture industry to-day is not paying approximately twice as much as is necessary for the same insurance as they have, in the same companies as they are insured in. It is doubtful if there is one who could not get back anywhere from twenty-five per cent. to fifty per cent. of what they have been overcharged by the companies."

Lest it might appear that this was either an unfounded or a biased opinion, I quote herewith as a preface to my further demonstration of the truth of these facts, from three publications, namely: "The World's Work", "Babson's Report" and "The Dear-born Independent."

EXCERPTS FROM "THE WORLD'S WORK"

"The insurance companies have led the public into bad bargains by skilfully preparing policies which include all manner of benefits, bonuses, investments and other 'prizes' tacked on. None of these 'prize' schemes have any inherent connection with life insurance. Some are speculative investments and other blind gambles; and some are gambles and speculative investments in one."

"The evil of frill policies originates with the companies; for these policies were the basis of the irresponsible millions the companies have worked so hard to heap up. In their struggle to sell these things, the whole business of selling life insurance has been debauched."

EXCERPT FROM BABSON'S REPORT

"I believe in life insurance. Insurance, like every other good thing, however, may be abused. Those who have insurance to sell sometimes get over-enthusiastic and promise things which can not be delivered. This is especially true when some life insurance agent attempts to sell life insurance as 'the best investment.'"

EXCERPTS FROM "THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT"

"Perhaps after a little inspection of the insurance business from the inside, as it were, we shall see some of the ways in which the public is being forced to pay enormously more for insurance than is warranted by the current cost, and in many cases maneuvered out of just rights after a policy has been taken out."

"It would seem almost as if life insurance is purposely made so complicated that the average buyer shall be unable to grasp the real significance of the jumbled policies that are offered for his acceptance."

What would you say if your tailor told you he had a dozen prices for the same suit, according to the engraving on invoices or bills?

Yet this is exactly the proposition the insurance companies make.

The above excerpts will corroborate my original statement, and the last reference is an accurate example of the so-called varied kinds of policies to be explained later.

AND THAT IS NOT ALL.

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in the holes she finds in the morning in the stuff I have written the night before. Each hole represents a word I can not spell even well enough to find it in the dictionary which is in constant use beside me while I write. The people for whom titles should be punctuated correctly do not need to understand punctuation. The printed language should be presented to them on the screen as it is presented to them everywhere else, just as I take pains to see that every word in *The Spectator* is spelled as you find it spelled everywhere else. My quarrel with screen punctuation is not one with those who write the titles. It is with the producers who do not regard education sufficiently highly to secure the services of at least one person in every organization who can reflect it on the screen. The kind of punctuation that we see most often now offends those who know how to punctuate and confuses those who know only how to read.

* * *

Just Why Do Directors Do Such Silly Things?

LOIS MORAN, in *The Whirlwind of Youth*, a Paramount whirlwind of close-ups, stands in a moonlit garden. Gareth Hughes walks up to her, making no apparent effort to deaden his footsteps. He pauses for a moment behind her, and she is startled greatly when she discovers his presence. Apparently if it had not been for the noise the moon made shining on the garden she would have heard him, for a moonlit garden late at night is otherwise a rather quiet place. Later in the same picture Donald Keith is alone in a large room fiddling with his puttees. Lois and quite an acceptable young actor who I think is the fellow who used to play with Alberta Vaughan in terrible two-reelers, enter the room and close the door behind them. They do not sneak in, but Keith is surprised greatly when he discovers they are near him. Will some director be so kind as to inform me why scenes are shot that way? I know one reason is that someone started doing it twenty years ago, but is it possible that there is no other reason? Anyone with any sense would know that there would be drama in Lois watching Hughes approach her across the lonely garden, and none in the utterly absurd assumption that she did not hear his footsteps, or in any way feel his presence until he spoke. The room in which Keith is alone opens off a barroom in which several officers are playing cards and drinking. The moment the door opens Keith must hear the voices from the other room, even if he did not hear the lifting of the iron latch on the door, a totally absurd assumption, for Lois and her escort make no effort to deaden the sound.

Writing for United Artists

JACK JEVNE

"TEMPEST" *John Barrymore*
 "BREAKFAST" *Constance Talmadge*
 "MCFADDEN'S FLATS" *First National*
 "LADIES AT PLAY" *First National*
 "CLINGING VINE" *Leatrice Joy*
 "EVE'S LEAVES" *Leatrice Joy*

Writers' Club — Hollywood 7145

But Keith hears nothing until the proper movie moment. What is gained by such childish directorial methods? You see the same thing in hundreds of pictures, and an equally ridiculous variation of it when a knock on a door greatly startles the occupant of a room. Is there supposed to be drama in keeping Keith unaware of the approach of the other two, in face of the fact that the audience knows that he could not help hearing them? Does the scene lose anything if he should look up the moment the door opens? In both instances these scenes are but little things in the picture, but it is the multiplicity of such absurdities that ruins so many pictures. They are the gauge that measures the degree of mentality that entered into the making of the production. I do not know if Griffith invented the startle when he invented the close-up, but whoever is responsible for it has a lot to account for. The screen has been brought to such a pass by incompetent direction that we rate as great pictures those whose stories are told merely as anyone with common sense would tell them. For this specific incompetence we have as a palliative the irritating influence of general studio incompetency which would seem to be enough to drive directors crazy, but even in moments of madness they should retain enough sanity to detect insanity in their methods. When directors are made to shoot from perfect scripts, and to stick to such scripts when shooting, all the silly little things that mar pictures now will be follies of the past, for they are creations of the method of making pictures and not of literary minds which conceive the stories. However, while we are going through the long process of evolving perfect scripts, we might improve the status of the screen art by the simple expedient of regarding each scene as it is shot as



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the most important in the production. It is not the great dramatic moments that make a picture outstanding. Its degree of perfection is the degree in which the little scenes, which reach from one big one to another, are presented. It may be the manner in which a man hands his hat and stick to a butler, the way in which a waiter serves the soup, or an office boy signs for a telegram—little things, but they are links in the chain and must be as strong for their size as all the other links. At present there are many missing links in pictures—and some of them draw large salaries.

* * *

The screen could do with a few more character women as genuinely funny as Marie Dressler and Polly Moran. As long as these two hold the center of the stage *The Callahans and the Murphys* is an amusing comedy. There is no other woman that I know of who can put over so much comedy by facial expression as Marie Dressler. Truly she is a scream. When sanity comes to production and really clever writers are allowed to put wit on the screen, Miss Dressler easily could become one of the best box-office bets in the business. Such a vehicle as the present one will not advance her prestige a great deal. It is richer in promise than in performance. But screen promises seldom are realized. If M.-G.-M. can not scare up a better story than *The Callahans* for Miss Dressler's return to the screen it is unlikely that it, or any other similarly conducted studio, will do better the second time. When the picture departs from the really amusing low comedy of Miss Dressler and Miss Moran and takes itself seriously it becomes very blah indeed. All the story there is in it endeavors to create the impression in the minds of viewers who can not recognize obvious movie tricks, that the daughter of one of the families has had an illegitimate child. It is a beautiful thought and presents accurately the studio's conception of a good story. That is what the supervisor system has done for Metro. I have no objection whatever to immorality on the screen, for it is by contemplating immorality that we value morality, but as it is presented to us in this picture it merely is cheap and vulgar. To the intelligent mind it is obvious all the time that the audience is going to discover that, after all, the girl is married, making the whole thing merely a silly attempt to be something that it isn't.

* * *

Road-shows are born, not made. I am repeating something which I said in *The Spectator* one year ago. To give a director one million dollars and a script and tell him to make a road-show is one of the craziest things the industry does. To announce an "epic" in advance is

equally crazy. The public makes road-shows, not the producers. Witness *Old Ironsides* and *Seventh Heaven*. The latter started off as a comparatively little picture and became a great one. The former started off as something great and became a very poor thing. At their inception all pictures should be of equal importance. The best possible scripts should be prepared, thus giving directors an even break to start with. The best of the ensuing product then can head the producer's releases. Baldly announcing that a certain picture is going to be a road-show merely because it is going to cost a stupendous sum is ridiculous.

* * *

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing Terry Duffy and his players are demonstrating at *El Capitan* is that it still is possible to see a good show for one dollar and a quarter. Don't let the price keep you away. Many times you have paid two or three times as much to see a performance not half so good. *Laff That Off* is more than just a comedy. It is a story of the beautiful love that exists between three men, an appealing theme for play or picture. Terry has brought to Hollywood a splendidly balanced company, and if he keeps up the pace at which he started off he and Dale might as well buy a bungalow and send for the rest of the stuff.

* * *

They say that Tom Mix is considering a proposition to go with a circus. That would account for the manner of his arrival at the *Banky-La Rocque* wedding. Apparently it was his first dress rehearsal.

PAUL SCHOFIELD

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"LEGALLY DEAD"

"THE JERSEY LILLIE"

"THE DREAM HOUND"

"UNDERWORLD"

"HOLD EVER'THIN"

ALMOST ANYONE CAN READ

By MADELEINE MATZEN

THOUSANDS — and once in a while a million or two—are spent each year on certain super-productions and de luxe feature pictures—and now they are retrenching. There is much talk of making cuts in salaries—the producers are scrambling around—trying to cut down expenses. The retrenching idea applies especially to the high priced scenario writers.

Of course, we believe that the cost of production in the big studios is absurd and wasteful. Production needs to be cut down. But how about the salaries of the well known scenario writers? How about slicing them and giving a part of the slice to new and untried authors?

Why are people like Frances Marion paid small fortunes for a continuity of some timeworn story? We are not envious, for Miss Marion is a skilful continuity writer, though it is quite some time since anything approaching a sparkling new idea has made its appearance in her continuities.

Old Stuff Rewritten

Between the Frances Marions of the industry and the hack scenario writer come swarms of men and women receiving large salaries for adaptations and continuities. And these adaptations and continuities are merely the old, old situations rewritten in the same manner in which they have always been rewritten. These writers are receiving large salaries for what they have done in the past—not for the work done to-day.

The producers realize this, yet they claim that they are powerless to help matters. They can't find new writers; there is safety in the well known name.

The bigger the producer the more apt he is to take the line of least resistance. He falls back on big names, and then he hollers because he loses money. And the long-suffering public continue to be coaxed, with very gilded publicity, into the picture houses to see what? Trite and banal pictures.

Mr. Laemmle and Mr. de Mille are always crying for new ideas—but I wonder just how much of a chance a story written by a brand new and heretofore unheard of author would have in their studios.

Readers at Fault

This situation is not the fault of Mr. de Mille or of Mr. Laemmle. I believe that they are quite sincere in their efforts to find worth-while stories. The fault lies with the underlings, with the readers in the various studios, for a curious form of snob-bishness exists in the reading departments. A process of judging stories by their EXTERIOR appearance and of judging the author in the same way.

For example: I was talking to one of the most successful scenario writers the other day. I asked him why he

was so successful, for as it happened his screen plays had never interested me particularly. With immense pride he showed me a copy of his latest effort. It was a thick affair, beautifully typed and exquisitely bound. With something like pity he showed me an effort that had just come in—a story running for about thirty pages, unbound, and with no attempt at exterior decoration.

"Not a bad story!" he told me, picking up the new arrival, "but we can't use it!" and he turned with pride once more to his own beautifully bound story. Seeing a twinkle in my eyes he went on, hastily, "Of course I give them so much MORE material in my stories. The trouble is that the new author never sends in enough material."

The Size Counted

All of which reminds me of the story about the newly rich woman who bought her paintings by the yard. The bigger the canvas the more she was willing to pay.

Not long ago an author brought her story to a producer. The story might have made a screen play for the star in question, but unfortunately it never reached the producer.

The reader into whose hands it was entrusted explained: "The title page was so dirty and the script was so dog eared, I just hated to give it to Mr. So-and-So (mentioning the producer). He is such a fastidious man!"

Now that particular producer was frantically searching for a story for his star. He also loves to tinker with his automobile, which as every one knows is not a clean habit. Also I saw the manuscript that had been condemned as too "dirty". It had a smudge or two on the title page, the edges were a bit worn, but it was in good condition; it was legible and it was an intensely dramatic story. The very same manuscript was sold just the other day, sold directly to a producer.

Clothes Unmade the Author

At another studio a reader holds a position because she is distantly related to a producer. She boasted that she had returned a story because the woman who presented it was dowdy—her clothes were "dreadful"; she was certain that she couldn't write. Incidentally the author in question was well known, but it happened that the reader had not come across her novels.

I want to know whether producers are buying beautifully typed manuscript written by smartly dressed people, or whether they are buying stories that would make dramatic screen plays? It's a great puzzle to me!

In almost every reading department very comfortable positions are being held down by people related (often very distantly) to the producer or to

the stars. These people rather lord it over the others, for they are there to stay. But I want to know if being related to a producer or a star makes one a judge of dramatic stories.

I have always heard that a sense of drama was something born in one and could not be cultivated.

It seems to me that it would be a worth while plan and a great help to the writers under contract if a few new ideas did filter across their desks. Technic is a hard-earned thing and most essential to the photo-dramatist, but of what earthly use is technic when there are no new ideas to apply it to?

New Ideas Wanted

If I were a producer I would welcome a new idea with open arms and a ready checkbook. I'd employ readers who knew a new idea when they saw one, that is, readers with background. I'd make every reader prove that he knew a dramatic theme and situation when he saw it. I'd give my annoying relatives a pension. I'd make them live AWAY from Hollywood, for I would fight to keep them away from the gate that lets thoughts, visions, dreams and drama into my scenario department. Keeping a business in the family may be a policy, but it's like preserving a dynasty—in the end it becomes effete. In the main that is what is happening to the motion picture industry—it has become effete.

The screen plays of earlier days had far more stamina, more imagination, more vitality, than those of the last few years. And one can not blame this entirely upon the censors. The industry needs NEW BLOOD, and it needs it most of all in the scenario departments.

The new writer should have his chance. It seems futile, stupid and unfair to close the door in his face. It seems stupid to yell continually "story policy", to employ only those who are familiar with the policy. What is "story policy" anyway? The main thing is to please the public, and all the public wants, and will pay for, is to be amused.

The Story's the Thing

The old ideas have lost their value as entertainment value. Why not give the public something new, something different? Why waste millions to make a dull Ben Hur when "Poverty Row" is waxing prosperous with its theory of "the story's the thing"?

The producers are not entirely to blame. But they have placed their trust in mediocre minds. They listen too much to politics talked by those who are lacking in vision. Politics rules and so do the many relatives. Some day a new producer will arise, unheralded and give the public fresh dreams, new ideas, beauty and drama. And the old ones will rub their heads and wonder how it all happened. If one company makes a box office suc-

cess, the others rush to make similar pictures, hoping to grab a little of the success for themselves. And yet there are always new stories to be had with a little careful searching.

For every Big Parade and What Price Glory there are a thousand stupid pictures. Yet Lawrence Stallings was once unknown.

Old Writers in a Rut

The old writers are writing in circles; their stories never get anywhere. Yet there is the whole great world to explore. The new writer is apt to be an explorer. He is not fighting to hold his own; he has time for enthusiasm.

This does not necessarily mean that the high schools and colleges should be combed for talent. To be sure one learns to read in school and at college, but the universities graduate thousands a year who have no ability at all as dramatists. Having an A. B. or an M. A. or a P. H. D. tied to your name does not guarantee that you

have any value at all as a photo-dramatist.

Then, too, genius often flowers late in life, and we need a few geniuses in the scenario departments.

Sincerity and background have value in any reading department, as do judgment and experience. I would exchange fifty literary lights fresh from college for one embryo Jim Tully or Knut Hamsun.

And I believe that the job of reader should be as highly paid as that of continuity writer. If the story be big enough and beautiful enough and dramatic enough, almost any skilful person can break it up into continuity.

Why pay large sums for the doctoring and patching up of a weak yarn, when there are strong vital ones to be bought?

Find the story. The rest is comparatively simple.

And to find a story one must have readers. Anyone can read, but how many have judgment and knowledge?

What You Should Know About the Law

Compiled by Roger Marchetti, of the Los Angeles Bar

It is difficult to define in legal terms just what constitutes an indecent performance. In the case of *People vs. Barney Kelly* (manager of National Winter Garden stock) et al., the cast was placed under arrest during the performance. At the trial of the case, Policeman Ford told of alleged indecent dialogue, and was corroborated by other officers. However, the evidence being too weak to support the charge, it was not necessary for defendants to testify. The charge was dismissed on motion of the attorney for the defence.

In a suit brought against Channing Pollock, well known author and playwright, Abraham Waxman charged Mr. Pollock with lifting from his play *Soldiers of the Common Good* his idea for *The Fool*. It was brought out, however, that he had never seen the manuscript of the Waxman play, and witnesses testified that he was considering the plot for *The Fool* in 1900 and that he wrote it from 1902 to 1908.

This case has been brought to a close recently in the New York courts, clearing Mr. Pollock of the charge.

Among recent arbitration cases in New York, with two decisions in favor of the exhibitor, were claims against Famous Players. The Rialto at Westfield, N. Y., was awarded \$236.50 from the Paramount New Jersey exchange because it did not receive the full amount of pictures contracted for. The theatre asked for \$500 damages.

The other victor against Famous Players was Lafferts, at Richmond Hill, L. I. Damages of \$700 were claimed on the ground that the house claimed seven days' protection on *For Heaven's Sake*, and received reimbursement for a large amount paid

for the picture. An award of \$150 was made.

Five years ago the Committee on Scientific Exhibit, recognizing the validity of criticisms against surgical film demonstrations in general medical ordinances, ruled that no films dealing with surgical technique could be shown in the motion picture theatres, although illustrated lectures on surgical topics were encouraged. "The motion picture film will, of course, always be of value for recording interesting or unusual conditions, such as nervous afflictions and motor defects . . ." it was declared by the committee, but the ruling remained the same "because the observer obtains an erroneous impression of the relative ease in performing unusual and difficult surgical operations."

A new note was sounded, however, when it was recently announced that a study of the physiognomy and physical attitudes in the different forms of mental diseases is soon to be undertaken. At Columbia University moving pictures demonstrated the actual movements of a heart with the organs exposed in a dog under an anesthetic. Under the influence of various drugs it was possible to permanently record and visually demonstrate the normal

heart beat and its variations under abnormal conditions. The experiment has been utilized for teaching purposes.

In a recent decree by the president of Cuba, a censorship of motion pictures has been provided, according to information received by the Children's Bureau, Department of Labor.

Under the Ministry of the Interior, a committee, consisting of six members, will examine all films with authority to bar those they consider objectionable to public morals, or offensive to the national honor, or that of a friendly nation.

Under a new ruling Cuban children, under fourteen years of age, may not be admitted to motion picture performances after 8:30 p. m., except on Sundays and holidays. Violations of the new law will provoke heavy fines, proceeds of which will be used for the purchase of educational films for the public schools.

As a result of Mexico's sensitive state, where her national pride is concerned, five of our completed pictures are on the shelf, and will not be released. It seems that there has been a law passed recently, to bar any films from being screened on Mexican territory where any of the characters are cast as Mexican villains. And that is not all. Even if the picture, depicting such villain of said nationality, is shown far from the Mexican border but is called to the attention of

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a Mexican ambassador who will promptly report it, every ensuing picture produced by the same director, will be barred from showing in Mexico. This ruling will hold good no matter what company the director may subsequently become affiliated with.

The attitude of foreign countries on American-made films is intricate and results in considerable worry for the producers. One of the most serious cases resulted when the table of

a German spy was shown decorated with a photograph of Hindenburg. The producer had evidently forgotten that Hindenburg is now president of the German Republic and that his photograph in the hangout of a despicable personage like a spy would aggravate the German government grievously.

All films made by the producer of that picture suffered for a considerable period following the showing of the film.

race just what each of us saw in it. The fact that the correspondent saw suspense in it can not be argued away, simply because it is a fact. A feeling is as much a fact as a ton of bricks, and you can't argue a ton of bricks out of existence. But I'll offer this in my own defense: I regard a picture as poor in the degree that it fails to realize its possibilities; a viewer, such as my correspondent, measures the entertainment value of only such possibilities as are realized. I think *The Yankee Clipper* is a very poor picture because, with the same material, it might have been a very good one; my correspondent thinks it a good picture because he did not concern himself with how much better it might have been.)

VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

ABOUT COSTUMES

Dear Mr. Beaton:

As manager and designer of the wardrobe for five years for Famous-Players-Lasky and for over a year in the same capacity for M.-G.-M. I think myself qualified to say a word concerning the efficiency demanded of the department.

The original plan of costuming a production was the working out of each scene with the director, scenarist, actor or actress. Later methods introduced the general supervisor and the efficiency man, all in consultation many times before the principals in the story were interviewed.

The method in vogue at M.-G.-M. was efficient in that a finished script was delivered to all departments, and the costumes planned, made and tested before the actual day of production started. This I found to be most satisfactory, and, if such methods were pursued in all studios, wardrobe problems would be nil.

One of the remarks I shall never forget in talking over difficult situations, such as working department heads twenty hours a day, is, "We grant you the adjustments you desire could be made, but the profits at the end of the year are gratifying, so why bother?"

The average director admits that he can not tell what a gown looks like until he sees it on the wearer, but the efficiency man blusters that he knows all about it; then comes the production manager, the assistants, property boys, set dressers, camera men and at last the actor or actress, and finally the wardrobe designers.

In executing a director's idea of a correctly gowned woman, the mode of the moment is not considered, every man having his idea of sex appeal and demanding its expression, likewise his own idea of a gentlewoman, etc. Every designer would appreciate being made to feel that his or her talent and studied taste counted for something. Erte had much to give the public, had his creations been recognized for their true value and had he not been manhandled by gross inefficiency.

Though we create here and no doubt set the world of fashion for the screen, it is most important that all designers be allowed to travel and communicate with the world at large. We can gather a valuable bit from every country in the world.

Constructive co-operation will lead to better results, and this many-hands-in-the-pot condition may partly have been brought about in training people for studio jobs. I was the first to bring about the two, and then the three, eight-hour shifts a day, now adopted in the studios, relieving the women of the long hours imposed on them.

ETHEL CHAFFIN.

To the Editor:

Why do you class *The Yankee Clipper* as one of the year's ten worst? I remember your review quite well. I read it before I saw the picture, and then I went twice to see the picture just because I had read your panning, and was more convinced the second time than the first, both by my own reactions and by those evident in each audience, that for once you were all wet. I'll admit that a forty-eight star flag of the early 1800's jarred the illusion, but on the whole there was for me, and apparently for the two audiences I studied, a real illusion there. Both myself and the audiences each time got a real kick out of the finish of that race which you criticized so vehemently. Are you wrong, or am I?

FRANK ROBERTS.

Tacoma, Wash.

(The two facts, that this correspondent liked *The Yankee Clipper* and that I disliked it, can not be reconciled. I am glad he liked it. I envy a person who can find enjoyment where I can not. To me there was no suspense in the frigate race; to him there was. Neither of us is wrong, for to each of us there was in that

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MATTER OF CREDIT

Dear Sir:

I heard an argument the other day between a scenario writer and a director in regard to the matter of credit. The writer was bitterly protesting against the practice of having several writers do adaptations on certain stories, all of which would be finally handed to one favored or lucky writer, who alone would be given credit.

The director somewhat sardonically maintained that this was an excellent system, and he instanced Metro-Goldwyn as an example of how the thing worked. A novel or play is bought. A dozen writers (unknown to each other perhaps) may be assigned to do an adaptation. The last writer—or rather the one picked out to do the final script—has the advantage of all the ideas contained in the several scripts and of course he gets the credit.

The director also said, with a wry grin, "The other fellows get their salaries anyway." But salaries are not enough. They are entitled to credit for their work. It is a notorious fact that many writers and also



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editors, who may not have even touched certain scripts, have their names blazoned upon the screen as being the adapter, scenarist or with having supervised or written the continuity.

Say a word or two for the poor dubs whose ideas have been thus tricked out of them; who have enthusiastically gone to work upon an adaptation with the deluded notion that they will be given credit for their work, only to find the other fellow's name substituted for theirs upon the screen. Occasionally a paragraph of publicity to the effect that John Dub is doing "Blooming Smiles" is allowed him; but that's as far as it goes. In most cases he simply is ignored on the screen.

There is more heart burning, more blighted hopes and heart aches in a scenario department because of this matter of credit than anything else. One fellow does the work. Another sails in and takes the credit.

The Screen Writers Guild is now preparing a standard contract for writers. This thing of credit certainly should be covered in such contract.

JOHN BUSH.

WHY AN AGE LIMIT?

Dear Mr. Beaton:

I am informed that certain of the motion picture companies have decided to engage only young writers to do their scenarios, adaptations and continuities. The Fox Films was especially mentioned, and it is a well-known fact that the producers are signing up young and new writers.

We have had a surfeit of "boy wonders" in executive positions and positions of authority. The youngsters holding the responsible posts of supervisors are jokes on most of the lots. Now we are to have young writers. Talent has no age. One needs to know life and to have lived it to write of it. There would be just as much sense in the Metropolitan Opera Company throwing out its singers when they had reached maturity and substituting for them flappers and flippers.

The finest of our pictures have not been done by kids, but by men and women who not only know life, but happen to have the God-given talent to write about it.

J. ARMSTRONG.
(A bit over 40)

A NURSE PROTESTS

Mr. Welford Beaton:

Why, oh why, when a picture corporation decides to turn out pictures containing hospital scenes with nurses, doctors, surgeons, etc., do they not try to get as near the real thing as possible?

I visited a theatre this past week to see the picture, Moulders of Men, with Conway Tearle. He tried to be a physician. Maybe he did study the ethics of the profession for about twenty minutes.

In one scene, after the operation, the famous surgeon, with his assistants, gathered in the superintendent's office, in which was the superinten-

dent of nurses. She remained seated while they were there. Ye gods! where did she get her training? Please advise the picture people that any registry will furnish them an honest-to-goodness nurse for a superintendent for less than they pay stars to act the part. I felt like calling: "Oh, please stand up until the doctor tells you to sit down."

But what avail to write, talk or print? Movie directors go on the theory that the audience, or the major portion of it, have the intelligence of children. So one day I expect to see a star taking a probation nurse's part, sitting in the superintendent's office, and the movie directors will think it correct.

M. T. M.

INTIMATE CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Welford:

Yesterday I received a statement from The Film Spectator, informing me that my subscription had expired and that \$3.50 was due your paper—that is, if I want to renew for another year.

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JEAN HERSHOLT.

Dear Jean:

In acknowledging receipt of your ten-year renewal I wish to thank you for the compliment which both the

size of the check and the words of your letter pay to The Spectator. It was a very generous thing for you to do.

WELFORD BEATON.

To which came this answer by night letter:

Dear Welford:

You got me wrong. I am not generous. I'm a tightwad. Some day you're going to get sensible and boost your subscription rate, and I wanted to get in before you do.

JEAN.

GOOD FOR COMEDY

I always have been interested in Lya de Putti when I have seen her on the screen. I have enjoyed her vivacity and bubbling gaiety when I have seen her at social gatherings. I have chatted with her sufficiently to become acquainted with her intelligence and sense of humor. I have not mentioned it to her, but I am satisfied that she could be developed into a comedienne who would become immensely popular. She has a sparkling personality that she has no opportunity to register in the parts assigned to her.

SOMETHING NEW

In one of Don Ryan's titles in When a Man Loves someone calls someone else a "rascalion". It has all the earmarks of a dirty crack, but I can't find any dictionary that has heard of it.

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No. 13

Box-Office Ratings of Writers,
Supervisors, Directors and Players

— 0 —

Inside Story of Salary Cut Fiasco

— 0 —

How Producers Used the
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— 0 —

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HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, AUGUST 20, 1927

Academy Becomes Tool of Producers

WELL, what of it? The curtain has rung down on the sublime salary cut farce which made ridiculous everyone connected with it except the people who staged it, the producers; and we are back just where we started. Ignorance and extravagance are still in the saddle; pictures will continue to be bad, and waste will lose none of its gorgeous bloom. All along the line the producers have scored a great victory. I am dazzled by the brilliance of it. They started on a fool adventure that gave promise of bringing down ridicule upon them, but by an astute movement they outwitted all other branches of the industry and emerged as the only ones to whom no blame attaches for the follies that were theirs until they switched them to the shoulders of their employees. Nothing quite so clever, or quite so funny, has happened for a long time. The employment of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as the catspaw to pull the producers' chestnuts from the fire was a stroke of absolute genius. When the Academy was organized the greatest obstacle it had to overcome was the feeling throughout the industry that it was a gesture of the producers to serve their own ends. The Spectator joined others who were equally sincere in protesting against this construction being put upon the unselfish efforts of those whose only purpose was to build up an organization that would be representative of the entire industry, and in which the producer representation would be but a fifth part. I felt that it was preposterous to challenge the good faith of such splendid picture people as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Fred Niblo, Conrad Nagel and others equally noted for their high ideals and personal integrity. But when the first emergency in the industry occurs, what do we find? The Academy becomes the tool of the producers. My genuine respect for those whom I have mentioned is lessened none by that fact; rather I admire them the more for being so rich in fine qualities as to be unsuspecting of others. Nor is my con-

fidence in the ultimate usefulness of the Academy disturbed by the fact of its first mistake. When it awakens to what the producers have done to it, it will be able better to take care of itself in the future. It is young yet, a condition it will outgrow, and we do not blame young things for being gullible. For Academy purposes the industry has been divided into five branches: writers, actors, directors, technicians, and producers. The whole virtue of its plan of organization is that it makes all branches equal, and that it functions as a whole as a representative of the entire personnel of the industry. But when put to its first test it functions entirely for the producers. Beyond being allowed to defray the heavy cost of the Biltmore conference and the incidental eating, the Academy, as far as I could observe from a spectator's seat, had nothing whatever to do with what went on in its name. One branch, the producers, called the other four branches on the carpet, lectured them, received their confessions, absolved them, and sent them back to their seats. The producers were the only ones who confessed to no sins. Why did the Academy not function as a whole? What right had the producers, in the name of the Academy, to conduct the conferences? If one branch had to take the lead, why the prodigious folly of making that branch the one that would fan to fresh heat the only misgivings with which the Academy has had to contend? Of course, I know the answers to all these questions. The Academy thought it was functioning. It was—just like the cat functioned at the fire that made the chestnuts hot. The only difference was that the Academy was permitted to pay for the chestnuts and to meet all the other expenses.

* * *

Producers Only Ones Without Sin

THE Academy as a whole had nothing to do with the calling off of the cut in salaries. Directors, writers, actors, and technicians, as organized bodies, had nothing to do with it. The conferences had nothing to do with it. It was called off two days after it was an-

ATMOSPHERE

Now and then there comes the fragrance
Of a soft exotic air
Wafting from some fair Utopia,
Out beyond the border, where
Reigns Romance; its magic aura
Toning life with roseate hue:
Joy to-day, delight to-morrow
As hope revives and dreams come true.

Now and then our eyes are gladdened
By some soul-uplifting view,
Aureate, splendid and suggestive
Of a realm more deeply true
To the spark divine within us,
Cradled in the lowly sod,
Climbing, with assistance tenuous,
Upward to the hand of God.

Pictures, too, can conjure visions,
Ravish hearts with sheer delight,
Weave the tapestries of morning,
Whisper, low, of love,—and night—
Sound the trumpets, stir to action
Cohorts of a thousand men—
Jove! great thunderbolt of vengeance!
. . . When?

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

JOSEPH FRANKLIN POLAND

Supervising Editor of Feature Comedies

UNIVERSAL

EDWARD CLARK

Dramatist-Scenarist

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TITLES *by*
DWINELLE BENTHALL
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HOLLYWOOD

ALFRED HUSTWICK

is in the hospital, enjoying an operation, or something, and tells me to hold everything until he gets out.

ANTHONY COLDEWEY

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nounced, and everything that happened thereafter was but a gesture by the producers to save their faces. When they started to get from under I doubt if they had any idea that they would emerge so brilliantly. The first blow struck at the threat to reduce salaries was such a heavy one, and was so well placed, that I am sure the producers thought that they were pretty much up against it. But they weren't stumped. The Academy was at hand to be used as a tool, and they used it, placed themselves in the right and all others in the wrong, and have a document that they can show to Wall Street to prove that the directors, writers, actors, and technicians have confessed to being responsible for the extravagance that has entered into picture making; that proves that after weeks of investigation by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, representative of the entire personnel of the industry, the only sin that was found for the producers to confess to was their failure to establish a central research bureau. I congratulate the producers on the magnitude of their victory. I am sincere in this, for I always can admire a resourceful fighter. Before I relate just how the cut in salaries was averted perhaps I had better explain how I arrive at my conclusion that the four branches of the Academy confessed to being responsible for the grotesque system of making pictures that rules in all the studios. All promises to reform are confessions of sins committed. If I agree to refrain from beating my wife, the agreement is tantamount to an acknowledgment that in the past I have beaten her. If it were not so, my promise to refrain would be a senseless thing. The actors in the Academy solemnly promised that hereafter they would not indulge in temperament. That is their confession that in the past they have made of themselves temperamental asses—either that, or it is their admission that they are crazy. The spectacle of them prostituting the dignity of a great dramatic art, that of acting before the camera, by grovelling on their bellies before the producers and promising to behave like normal human beings, is a sickening one. And the same thing goes for the directors, writers, and technicians. Everyone of them knows that the rank incompetence of the producers is responsible for the wanton squandering of the industry's money, but not one of them was man enough to stand up and prefer such a charge. If the producers did not have the Academy and all its members as individuals squarely under their thumbs why was no mention made of the eight-hour day, something that four-fifths of the Academy is for wholeheartedly? While the confessions were in order, did Louis B. Mayer confess to bringing Ivan Turjanski to this country and paying him a salary for twelve months before giving him one opportunity to earn any of it? While he was insulting the members of the Academy by serving notice on them that they would be expected to keep their promises, did Cecil de Mille confess to paying Jetta Goudal sixty thousand dollars in salary while she was waiting for him to find a story for her? After the writers confessed that they have been turning out slovenly scripts, did Jesse Lasky confess that the department he heads, in an effort to make a picture out of Looie the Fourteenth, shot thirteen reels of such rotten stuff that the whole thing is being done over again? After the directors confessed that they have made production expensive by interfering arbitrarily with stories, did Joseph M. Schenck rise and acknowledge that he brought to this country Vladimir

Dantchenko, founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, and for a year has been paying him a salary without knowing what to do with him? No, to all questions. It was the producers' circus, and no one ever makes the owners of a circus jump through the hoops.

* * *

Why They Called Off the Salary Cut

WHEN Conrad Nagel telephoned Louis B. Mayer at eleven o'clock on the night after the salary cut was announced, the cut suggestion received a shock from which it passed away next day, although its death was not announced officially until the conclusion of the long wake held at the Biltmore. Nagel spoke as the representative of a small group of picture people who met at the Hollywood Athletic Club to discuss the plan of the producers. He told Mayer that those he represented were quite willing to accept the cut in salaries provided they were allowed to satisfy themselves that the financial conditions of the companies were such as to make the cut an economic necessity. Mayer wanted to come in from Santa Monica to appear before the meeting, but that would not suit the little group at the club, and it scattered before anyone could arrive and discover what a little group it was. Next day the producers were given an ultimatum in line with the message of the preceding night: "Open your books, or call off the cut; and if you won't do either, all the newspapers in the country will be informed that such is our stand." From that moment the salary cut was dead, and the problem of the producers was how to get out gracefully. It was here that the Academy stepped to the front and while acting in perfectly good faith consistent with its high ideals, nevertheless became the catspaw of the producers. One thing none of the companies could do was to display its books, and it could not publicly refuse to do so. Take Mayer's position. He had made one of his eloquent speeches to his employees, calling them his partners, and making a virtue of the fact that his own salary was being cut twenty-five per cent. If they had been permitted to see the Metro books his new partners would have made some interesting discoveries. They would have found that Mayer's remuneration is one hundred thousand dollars a year salary and ten per cent. of the profits of the company. Metro is making money. Anything it can save on salaries means just so much more profit. Supposing Mayer's eloquence had benumbed his employees into accepting a cut in salaries equal to his own. Metro has a pay-roll of about two hundred thousand dollars per week. Reducing it by twenty-five per cent. would mean additional profits of two million, six hundred thousand dollars a year. By his self-sacrificing cut upon which he expended so much virtuous eloquence, Mayer would lose twenty-five thousand dollars in salary, but would gain two hundred and sixty thousand dollars as his share of what he had persuaded his new partners to surrender. Other things equally interesting would have been revealed by the books. Why was a location trip during shooting of *The Crowd* charged on the books at about five times its actual cost? would have been one of the irritating questions the new partners might have asked. None of the studios would dare open its books. The producers could not afford to be on the square with their employees, and as soon as they realized

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that they had to be, or withdraw the salary cut, they adopted the alternative. When they decided to reduce salaries they never for a moment imagined that it would not be accepted humbly by those whom it affected. When they discovered what they were up against they made a masterly retreat. They put the whole industry on trial, found it guilty, made it promise never to do it again, and allowed the Academy to foot all the bills. The sheer brilliancy of it amazes me.

* * *

Brilliant Victory For the Producers

REVIEWING the results of the conferences we find that the employees have emerged with nothing to compensate them for the humiliation that was heaped upon them. The producers promised definitely to do only such things as would benefit them; they ignored the request for an eight-hour day, and made an indefinite promise to consider fair standard contracts. Since January fifth of last year a standard contract submitted by the Writers' Guild has been buried in the files of the Hays organization. Why the delay in considering it if the producers had the slightest intention of being on the square with those who write and prepare their stories? Nothing in their past records would indicate that their promise now to take up the matter was made in good faith. Why did the Academy, the champion of the rights of the employees, allow the conferences to close without some definite action being taken towards the adoption of a fair contract? It had in its possession definite proof that the producers intended to put over the salary cut with the aid of the black-balling weapon that they wield with so much agility. Why was it not made public at the banquet that Warner Brothers told two of their contract employees that if they did not accept the salary cut they would find every studio in Hollywood closed against them? The Academy knew that such a threat had been made, but it was such a humble tool in the hands of the producers that it was afraid to give utterance to its knowledge. All the speakers extolled the Academy for restoring harmony in the industry. It is the kind of harmony that the cat felt while it was digesting the canary. Friends of The Spectator have urged it to maintain the spirit of harmony by refraining from discussing the results of the conferences. They ask me not to stir things up by discussing the producers personally, to avoid allowing my personal feelings towards them to enter into the controversy. If any producer feels that I have any personal interest in him he flatters himself. The single aim of The Spectator is at better pictures, and it can accomplish nothing if it shoots around corners in an effort to keep from hitting those who stand between it and its target. It is thinking only of the target and it intends to keep on firing. If any producers are hit it is because they are standing in the line of the bullets, and not because they themselves draw the fire. There is no individual connected with pictures

TOM REED

Titles

big enough to be the subject of concern when the future of screen art is being considered. When I contemplate the masterly manner in which the producers emerged triumphant from a situation that was fraught with danger to their dignity and credit, I have a feeling of respect for them that I never felt before. I am sorry that I can not see eye to eye with them. I would like to line up with such a resourceful bunch. But I have no interest in their welfare, nor in the welfare of those who work for them. I have an abiding respect for the screen as an art. I believe it can be made the greatest of all arts, and that is all that concerns me. All the great benefits that have come to mankind have been born of turmoil. There will have to be a revolution in pictures before they achieve their destiny. I thought I saw it coming when the salary cut turmoil began, but I did not count on the extraordinary astuteness of the producers. But they only have staved off the revolution; they have not averted it. They will present their clean bill of health to Wall Street, but sooner or later Wall Street will be able to appraise it at its true value. The grotesque waste of money in making pictures must come to an end. The conferences evolved nothing to end it. The confessions of the employees were just about as absurd and fruitless as the promises of the producers will prove to be. I do not believe that the present personnel will do anything to improve conditions. But other succor is on the way. New capital is becoming interested. The temptation to tell you all about it is strong within me, but it will keep. It will not be long before we are getting better pictures made sanely.

* * *

But One Idea in "The Unknown"

TOD BROWNING had just one idea when as author and director he was working out *The Unknown*: a fake armless wonder who became a real one by having his arms amputated because he believes the girl he loves will like him better that way; and while he is being pined the girl falls in love with someone else. One idea in a story I'll admit is more than the average, but even in a picture that is fortunate enough to possess one, there should be a few collateral ideas to help make it entertaining. In *The Unknown* we are aware all the time that there is but one idea and we can detect evidences of the painstaking labor to build up to it. The idea itself is ridiculous, if we are to take the picture seriously, which I presume is what Browning would like us to do. In any event, a production with a star of the importance of Lon Chaney is important enough to occupy a critic's attention. In writing a screen story you can not base the biggest situation in it on anything in itself beyond credence. Joan Crawford does nothing to show Chaney that she loves him, yet he deliberately has his arms amputated because he thinks she is going to marry him. It is unbelievable that a man would do such a fool thing, therefore the whole story is unconvincing and uninteresting. Browning no doubt wanted to present Chaney as a victim of the irony of fate, but overlooked an obvious opportunity to do it effectively. He should have shown Joan madly in love with the man she thought was armless. This would have got away from the over-strain in registering Joan's purely manufactured distaste of men's hands, and it would have given a semblance of reason to Chaney's action in

whittling himself down to the dimensions that Joan loved. Fate could have stepped into the picture while Chaney was at the hospital and transferred Joan's affections from Chaney to Kerry, Chaney's unexplained absence being the impelling motive. There would have been some irony in such a situation, and it would have made it an infinitely better story. I don't think Tod Browning ever will give us a great picture as he is too firmly addicted to all the moss-grown methods of constructing one. His habit of spoiling most of his sequences by showing them entirely in close-ups plays havoc with *The Unknown*. He does not seem to consider it of any importance to plant the relation of the characters in a scene to one another. In one sequence in this picture Chaney and Joan speak titles into the air and there is nothing to show that they are in the same county. At the end of the sequence Joan exits and joins Lon, which finally clears up the mystery of to whom each was speaking. The good director is he who can put over a scene while keeping his main characters in it. Browning never has revealed an ability to do this. In a measure he has a fine pictorial eye and succeeds in intriguing our visual sense without making any appeal to our brains. It is too bad that the fine actor of Mr. Wu is wasted in such a grotesque offering as *The Unknown*. Joan Crawford is very satisfactory in this picture and to me her characterization is the only meritorious feature of the production. Elaborate care is taken to acquaint the audience with the fact that she has a fine figure, to which I certainly offer no objection. I feel grateful to Browning for demonstrating to me that she has beautiful legs. I also was glad to note, when my mind was not occupied with its reaction to her legs and the rest of her physical self, that she is coming on as an actress. Norman Kerry and John George pleased me when they were not in scenes with Joan. When they were I did not notice them.

* * *

Milton Sills in a Very Poor Picture

ONE lieutenant in the American air force had a fine time in France during the war. Milton Sills plays him in *Hard Boiled Haggerty*. He soaks his major in the jaw, bawls out a general and a lot of staff officers sitting as a board of inquiry, to-hells the United States army as a whole, tears off his uniform and throws it on the floor, and then indulges in some high and lofty ranting that must have played havoc with the cords in his neck when the scene was being shot. Following that a girl, who simply is too sweet to be a street walker, says she is one, all is forgiven, the general picks the uniform from the floor and emotionally assists Milton to put it on. After the war is over Milton and his major stage a party, a character named Klaxon horns in, the street walker person also walks in, and Milton, wearing the uniform of a United States officer, drags her out of a cafe to ask her if she can remember what she was to him, and there is a fade-in to Milt moping at midnight in front of a fire. The girl comes to him and we discover she is a twin. In fact, both of her come, which clears the mystery. Milt becomes the brother-in-law of the street walker, and the curtains draw together in front of the screen. It is a silly picture. To start with, Milton Sills has no business playing opposite a seventeen-year-old girl. If so young a girl must be in a picture with him he should play her father,

not her sweetheart. Nor should he ever attempt a character part of this sort. Not in one scene in *Hard Boiled Haggerty* is he at all convincing. His heroics in front of the board of inquiry might have had some merit if the whole sequence had not been so extremely absurd and so contrary to all military traditions. Never at any time is the audience allowed to forget that he is a movie star. It is stressed that he spends ten days A. W. O. L. in Paris. When he returns his major hugs him and pins a Distinguished Service Cross on his manly breast. He gives the cross to the girl. Keeping the audience in ignorance of the fact that Molly O'Day is playing a dual role is an infantile trick that defies all rules of dramatic construction. The audience discovers it only in the closing sequence, and then it can't remember which was the street walker and which the sweet girl in the earlier scenes. If we had known all the way through that Molly was playing a dual role we might have been able to appraise her performance, and certainly we could have followed the story more intelligently. We can thank the censors for being instrumental in keeping Molly from being shown entirely naked. Wid Gunning, who produced the picture for First National, registered the fact that he would have preferred to show her naked, but was afraid that the censors, who prevent real art being presented on the screen, would foolishly cut it out. In an early scene he reveals an exquisite taste in comedy. He shows where Arthur Stone vomited over the side of an airplane. It is a beautiful touch. When I see evidences of such real genius, such perfect taste and ennobling inspiration, I bow down to the great minds that conceive it. The only male acting in the picture is done by Mitchell Lewis as the major, and by George Fawcett, who has a small part. Molly O'Day has something. I never saw her before, but she impressed me very much. She is a pert looking little miss. I would like to see her again before passing final judgment, but she looks to me at first glance as a young woman who is worth watching. The picture shows how badly First National needs some screen brains on its lot. It is the kind of production that brings discredit on the whole industry.

* * *

Curtiz Gives Us a Very Good One

THE acclimatization of Michael Curtiz is proceeding apace. He is making progress in accommodating his foreign conception of directing a picture to the conditions he finds over here. He and Buster Collier are the heroes of *The Devil's Paradise*, which he recently has made for Warner Brothers as a starring vehicle for Irene Rich. In this picture Irene also advances a step. Her characterization is a dramatic one, that of a woman who does not know what she wants. She marries Bill Russell in order to exchange London for the Sahara, for she pictures the desert as a place of romantic beauty. But she finds that its merciless sun, the maddening symmetry of its burning sands, the unbroken silence of its unending days are poor relief from London's drabness. She lets herself go, is careless of her personal appearance, and almost untrue to her marriage vows. It is the best bit of work that I ever have seen her do. But Collier carries off the acting honors, partly because he has a more dominant part than the star, but principally by the conviction

and understanding that he puts into his work. It is a highly dramatic part and he rises to heights that I never before have seen him attain. He is going to be heard from. John Miljan gives a splendid performance of a man who loses his reason on account of his sufferings when he is lost in the desert. It is a part that could have been entrusted safely only to an actor of ability, and Miljan is that. It offers temptations to overdo it, something that Miljan avoids. Russell is wholly equal to the demands of his characterization, but I could not help wishing that he could have been a little more English in appearance and mannerisms as he was playing the part of an English army officer. Curtiz has directed the picture with rare regard for its dramatic and pictorial possibilities. He eschews the freak shots that spoiled his *Third Degree*, and instead gives us some desert views of extraordinary beauty. When Miljan breaks out of his cell and imagines he is leading his soldiers, Curtiz shows us the shadowy forms of the imaginary force advancing across the screen, a very effective shot both dramatically and pictorially. *Devil's Paradise* is so unlike the usual Warner picture that we would gather from it that Curtiz is left pretty much alone. Certainly the excellence of his direction bears none of the outward evidences of the inefficient supervision that generally makes the pictures of this studio such very indifferent examples of screen art. It is only when we come to the studio's contribution to it that we find any weaknesses. The story is based on a faulty premise. Miljan, an insane man, is going to tell Russell that the latter's wife had an affair with Collier. For the double purpose of saving his life and the woman's reputation Collier shoots Miljan. At the court martial he refuses to explain why he shot the demented man, and is sentenced to life in prison. His silence would prompt gossip which quite naturally might point its finger at the wife, for you can't keep things hidden in a small garrison. Collier could have made sure of saving her reputation and avoiding his own life sentence by telling part of the truth: that the demented man had broken out of his cell and attacked Collier, who had to shoot to save his own life. It would have been a reasonable explanation and it would not have been questioned. The whole story is based on the killing and the court-martial, and as the scenarist made a poor job of handling them in the script, the picture will not stand up under a critical analysis. There is another typical Warner Brothers contribution to this production: grossly ignorant punctuation of titles and an idiotic use of italics. Isn't there at least one person on the Warner lot who knows how the English language should be written?

* * *

Chaney in a New Character Study

LONG CHANEY'S latest, *Mockery*, ends just where it should be beginning. It is a character study of a simple-minded Russian peasant, and from an acting standpoint is one of the best things that Chaney ever has done. But the story lacks finality. Barbara Bedford, who comes mighty close to stealing the picture owing to her convincing interpretation of a Russian aristocrat, enlists the service of Chaney to guide her to a town. Her beauty and grace appeal to the simple fellow, and he becomes her slave. At the end of a logical sequence of events

leading up to the outbreak of the Red revolution, he defies her, but later she saves his life, in return for which he defends her from attack by two revolutionists. He is battered in his encounter with the pair, but as I gathered from the closing scene he will survive his wounds and continue in the service of the lady. The story ends with the apparent victory of the loyal troops. But we know that the victory could have been but temporary; that the Reds won out finally. What, then, happened to the aristocrat and the peasant after the peasantry was all-powerful? We know that right after the story ends the position of the two was reversed. The most interesting phase of their relations came then. Even though the picture runs seven reels, I felt when it ended that it just had got nicely under way, and I would have been content to view several more reels of it, for it had interested me all the way through. Benjamin Christensen wrote and directed the story. I am of the opinion that he overlooked a wonderful opportunity—an opportunity to center the spirit of the revolution in the mind of one peasant and portray his mental development from a serf to a ruler, from one of the oppressed to an oppressor. When the picture started I thought that this was what he was going to do, but except for one brief moment when it looked as if the peasant's mind was about to break through its primitive simplicity, Chaney's characterization has no high spots to give it relief. But as a study in simplicity it is a very worthy piece of acting, although I believe the picture will not be popular. Chaney's appearances are coming too frequently for his own good. He should not make more than two a year. He is a tremendous box office favorite now, and Metro, in attempting to cash in on that fact, is overplaying its hand. Mockery shows every evidence of hasty production. Technically it is a very bad picture. The lighting is pale, uninteresting and faulty. We have several views of a cellar which is lighted through the opening of a trap-door which leads to it. In one scene the door is closed without affecting the lighting. The characters look up at the closed door and the light still streams down on their faces. Again we have that common fault—the lighting of a medium shot and of a close-up of it not corresponding. And there are ten times as many close-ups as there should be. One important sequence has as its motivating point the butler's failure to serve cream with tea. In Russia they don't serve cream with tea. Barbara Bedford and Ricardo Cortez have a love scene in the middle of a wide-open park, a la movie. Characters in a hurry to get from one point to another stop at the chalk mark placed on the floor by the assistant cameraman, wave their arms, say something, and resume being in a hurry. Even Cortez, enraptured by the prospect of taking his sweetheart in his arms, pauses in the doorway to wave at her, very much a la movie. When this picture is released a lot of people will share my opinion that Barbara Bedford is one of the most capable young actresses we have. I don't know any other who could

have played the aristocrat as convincingly as she does in Mockery.

* * *

Maynard's Latest Is Without Merit

ONCE upon a time I encountered a preview of *Overland Stage*, a Ken Maynard Western. It pleased me so much that right then and there I decided to let hunting Maynard previews become a habit. The next I saw was not so good. One I saw the other night was very bad. I've broken off the habit. The best thing about *The Devil's Saddle* is the punctuation of the titles. It is perfect except for the absence of an interrogation mark after the question, "Who's cuckoo now?" The only other entirely satisfactory feature of the production is the acting of Tarzan, the horse. He outshines the star and everyone else in the cast. The picture is just a Western movie, full of all the fool things that you find in most pictures of the sort. Charles R. Rogers is the producer. Once he told me that he was simply a business man with some knowledge of life, and that one thing I could count on in any picture of his was the absence of things that anyone with common sense knew were not done in real life. Yet in *The Devil's Saddle* we have Ken Maynard being kept in jail for three months waiting to see if a man he was accused of shooting would die of his wounds. A title tells us that as the man lived Maynard was released. I believe the practice in real life is to do something to a man who shoots another, even if the shootee does not kick the bucket. Later Maynard is accused of killing another man, with whom he is having a fight when the real villain fires the fatal shot. Will Walling, Ken's father, is sheriff. He asks Ken, for whom things look very bad indeed, if he committed the nefarious crime. Ken says he did not. That settles it. The sheriff and the law are satisfied. But the sheriff happens to ask his son why he was fighting with the man who was killed. Ken will not tell. That changes everything. It convinces Walling that Ken really is a murderer. The sheriff resigns by taking off his badge, and he pins it on the vest of another fellow, thus signifying that the other fellow is sheriff. Generally we have elections to determine who is sheriff. Somewhere along in the picture Walling is accused of killing someone, and the case against him is considered conclusive, because a man speaks a title, "I have his horse as evidence." How a horse can be evidence I don't know. There are three off-stage killings in the picture, but when the Indians attack the ranch house and hundreds of shots are fired by the red and white sharpshooters, some of whom are at all times exposed, not one of them is winged even. The story is announced as being one of the "Modern West", but is full of decorated Indians, barrooms, guns and much shooting. I thought these were features of the pre-modern West. *The Devil's Saddle* looks as if it might have been produced by a bunch of children playing at making a motion picture. It is silly all the way through and does not contain one logical sequence. I still maintain that there is a wonderful field throughout the world for really good Westerns, and at one time I thought that Rogers, the business man, had enough business acumen to make it peculiarly his own. In Maynard he has a good looking chap who is one of the best riders in the world, but he is being spoiled as an attraction just as fast as

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Rogers can spoil him. There is no excuse for any producing organization turning out a picture as utterly ridiculous as this one.

* * *

However, This One Isn't So Very Bad

AND just to make me eat my words about Maynard pictures in general, Charlie Rogers invited me to view another one within a week after I saw *Devil's Saddle*. This time it was *The Red Raiders*, and after it goes through a pruning process it will be a pretty good picture. Indians are good screen material, and there are a lot of them in this picture. There is one sequence showing them endeavoring to wipe out the whites, which include two troops of United States cavalry, the period being directly following the Civil war. Albert Rogell has directed this sequence so well that it of itself is quite enough to make good entertainment out of any picture containing it. There is the old hokum of the troops riding hard to relieve the garrison and arriving at the moment when the Indians are about to begin the scalping, but it is handled so well that we forget it is hokum, and we cheer when the cavalry comes pounding down the hill. After all, the old thrills are the best. There is some smart cutting in this sequence. A medium shot of a man aiming and firing is followed instantly by a long shot of someone doing a remarkable fall. Rogell handles both the troops and the Indians in a manner that makes the sequence highly dramatic and gripping. There are scenes in it that are magnificent. The flight of the settlers in their covered wagons, the Indians leaving camp to wage their warfare, and the troops spreading out as they rush to the rescue of the hard-pressed white men are as stirring as anything that I have seen in pictures in a long time. Rogell is competent at this kind of direction. In his intimate scenes he does not show the same sureness. I do not know whether it was he or the author who made a wholly impossible character of an army captain. He is so unreal that no scene in which he appears carries any conviction. Rogell is happier in handling comedians. There are three in *Red Raiders*, and they are in it a little too much. "Comedy relief" is one of the several things that are put in pictures mechanically. It is something that some producers think must be in, and, although they do not know why, they put it in. In this picture we have several stirring scenes showing Maynard doing some of his magnificent riding. He is breaking a wild horse. Every time the struggle between the man and the horse grows exciting there is a cut to some inane antics of people unrelated to the action. I presume such action is put in a picture to entertain the audience. Frequent cuts to people to show their reaction to it would indicate that its sole purpose was to provide an excuse for some unfunny comedy. Such cutting shows that the maker of the picture does not attach as much importance to the drama in the scenes as he obviously must desire the audience to attach to it. Drama should be built up. It is torn down when a lot of silly stuff is injected into it. The first part of *Red Raiders* is weakened greatly by tiresome comedy which breaks the thread of the story, and the story is not strong enough to bridge such gaps successfully. But it provides Maynard with some opportunities to do some of his superb riding. In one shot he leaps from a stage

coach, knocks a man off a horse and takes his place in the saddle, the whole thing being done with bewildering speed and neatness. Maynard's horse, Tarzan, is a magnificent beast and has become my favorite screen equine hero. I would be quite content to gaze on five or six reels of nothing but him and Maynard. I can't reconcile *Devil's Saddle* and *Red Raiders*. It is hard to believe that they were turned out by the same organization.

* * *

George Melford Scores With Veidt

CONRAD VEIDT came to this country with the reputation of being Europe's greatest screen actor. Several of the intelligent members of the foreign colony in Hollywood rated him as the greatest in the world. In John Barrymore's *Beloved Rogue* Veidt gave a very fine performance, but the part was not big enough to permit us to judge fully of his ability. We get a better view of him in *A Man's Past*, his first starring picture in this country, directed by George Melford for Universal. Veidt and Melford share the honors of the production. The former is a gifted actor, and the latter an intelligent director. The star's characterization is that of a skilled surgeon who escapes from prison and thereafter lives in constant dread of being discovered and sent back to his cell. The story is dignified by the fine friendship that exists between Veidt and Ian Keith, and the romance in which Veidt and that capable actress, Barbara Bedford, figure. The star gains his effects without any of the over-acting that is not unusual with European actors. He was fortunate in having good direction in his first starring picture, as Melford built his scenes in a manner that enables Veidt to get everything out of them. The chief feature of Veidt's performance is the evident sincerity that he puts into every scene. He has an expressive, intellectual face, and a compelling screen personality. The opening sequence in the picture grips the audience. It is directed splendidly, bringing out vividly all the miseries of prison life. The lighting and the composition of the scenes are effective. There is a quick change from them to a waterfront cafe, a scene that reflects perhaps the best individual bit of direction in the picture. Most of our directors are not able to handle more than two or three characters in a scene, and leave their background people to take care of themselves, which they do like a lot of sticks. Melford makes his cafe realistic, and gives the scene the further virtue of having its central action carried on in a manner that in real life would not attract the attention of the patrons of the place. There is a wide diversity of scenes in the picture—a prison, a laboratory, operating-room, drawing-room, an oasis, and wide expanses of sand, and in all of them Melford is equally sure of himself. The faults of the picture seem to be the faults of the editing. Emil Forst's continuity leaves nothing to be desired, and Tom Reed has written a good set of titles, but in places the film drags on account of poor cutting. Scenes that are important only as advancing the story are cut into close-ups at a time when they should move along with the least amount of interruption. A sample of the wooden cutting is given in the final fadeout. It is preceded by a beautiful desert scene in which the lovers are quite distinct. It is an ideal shot for the fadeout, but convention demands a close-up of the clinch, and there is an utterly brainless cut

to such a scene as the picture concludes. But *A Man's Past* is, on the whole, a thoroughly satisfactory picture, and is a good introduction of Veidt as a new star. Charles Logue is credited with being story supervisor, and if the merits of the story can be attributed to his supervision he deserves considerable credit for the success of the production. Paul Kohner produced the picture. He is a young man who is making progress.

* * *

Langdon's Last Is a Very Poor Thing

WHEN it was announced that Harry Langdon was to direct his latest picture there no longer was any doubt about what kind of a picture it would be. I saw it the other night. It is just the kind of picture you would expect it to be. Langdon apparently was generous with his dispensations. In addition to a director, he seems to have dispensed with author, continuity writer, editor and cutter. *Three's a Crowd* is a pitiful thing. Throughout its wearisome reels there are some evidences of Langdon's talent for superficial pantomime, but it all means nothing, as there is not one genuinely funny scene in the entire picture. Surrounded by people with picture sense he could become a great box office favorite. It is too bad to see his value ruined by his own inability to grasp the fact that he is just a screen comedian who needs all the outside help he can get to put him over with the public. One would gather from *Three's a Crowd* that there was no one with picture brains on the lot when it was made. One solemn sequence follows another without presenting one moment of real comedy. There is an attempt at symbolism that is too deep for me—shots of a rag doll undergoing various hardships. I have no idea what was meant by them. It makes no difference in a motion picture what idea the producer had in his mind when he made a certain sequence; what counts is what the audience sees in it. There is an attempt at a story. A girl leaves her dissolute husband, and it is planted that somewhere in the offing there are rich relatives of one or the other of them. Instead of going to one of the homes that must have been open to her, the girl lies on the snow to die, or something. Harry finds her, takes her to his room, and she rewards him by promptly giving birth to a baby. Which surprises him. Thereafter the newly born baby becomes the chief prop and is treated in a way that will make every parent in an audience shiver. It is perhaps the most stupid exhibition of screen psychology that I ever saw in a picture. When the girl's husband finds her—how he does it is not made clear—the mother hands the baby to the chauffeur, who takes it to the waiting car. Can you imagine a mother handling a baby as if it were a bundle of laundry? That single incident shows the absolute lack of intelligence that entered into the making of the picture. I do not blame the members of Langdon's staff for not understanding mother love. Perhaps they are bachelors who have had no contact with it. What I blame them for is putting in a picture something of which they are entirely ignorant, and not getting someone with knowledge of the subject to tell them what to do with it. I don't know what I was supposed to do, cry or laugh, when the family departs and leaves Langdon holding a lamp at the top of a flight of steps. Perhaps the scene is a pathetic one, but I would have to read the

script to make sure. Early in the career of *The Spectator* I predicted the rapid diminishing of Langdon's drawing power if he did not secure better stories. I predicted that his first two pictures would make considerable money on account of exploitation, and that the third would make a much poorer showing. In the last issue Norman Webb showed with his percentage table that in the list of the two hundred and two pictures that made most money for exhibitors during the past eighteen months, *The Strong Man* was seventieth, *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp*, seventy-fifth, and *Long Pants* two hundred and second. The figures seem to bear out my prediction. The Langdon pictures come away below those of the other established comedians. And the pity of it is that he has talent, but not enough sense to give it a chance.

* * *

Clara Bow in Hopeless Mess

HULA, Clara Bow's latest, not yet released, is going to be another financial winner for Paramount. And it ultimately is going to cost Paramount a lot of money. A great many millions of people will view it because Clara is in it, and most of them are going to be so disappointed that they will be chary about picking another of her pictures as a source of an evening's entertainment. Hula is aggressively bad. Most pictures that you don't like fail to please you because of their sins of omission. Hula annoys you because of its sins of commission. Clara, the vibrant young American girl who can be sweet and devilish, fascinating and tantalizing, all at the same time, in this picture is a brainless little fool who makes a dead set for a married man. The whole story is one of her love affair with the man who already has a wife, and in the end Clara lies to the wife to lead her to get a divorce. Imagine that for the girl whom millions of girls all over the world have grown to admire as a typical product of an American home! True, an effort is made to excuse the wildness of the yarn by planting that the man is unhappy with his wife. It is an excuse that will not be accepted. If Paramount had undertaken deliberately to injure Clara's box-office standing it could not have selected a better vehicle. Hula lacks one redeeming feature. Every time we are given a glimpse of Clara's home it is filled with a crowd of drunken people, and her father boasts that he sobers up only once a year. The drunkenness is inserted for whatever entertainment value it has on its own account, for there is no other excuse for it. Clara ultimately gets drunk herself, undresses herself and dances for the edification of a wild crowd. Her action is instrumental in starting a most ridiculous fight between Clive Brook, the hero-husband, and Arnold Kent. Brook is supposed to be an English gentleman, and it must have been disturbing to that fine actor to be forced to depict someone's conception of such a character. To start with, he is much too old to play opposite Clara, and if he had been a real man he would have told her in their first encounter that he was a married man. Clara's dog runs out of the house as a ruse to break up a bridge game by making Brook desert it to give chase to the dog. The dog falls into a stream of water and Brook heroically dives in to rescue it. It is supposed to be a thrilling scene, but as the whole sequence is based on someone's absolute ignorance of the way of a dog, it is ridiculous. In the first place,

(Continued on page 14)

STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

NOTE BY THE EDITOR—The figures which are presented herewith should not be accepted as The Spectator's opinion of the relative merits of the individuals whose names appear in the lists. For instance: Eric Pommer is eleventh on the list of supervisors, yet anyone who knows anything about pictures knows that he has no equal in the world for picture intelligence. Thalberg leads the supervisors, which means that with all the money in the world and many famous stars at his disposal he made pictures which took in more money at the box-office than those of any other supervisor. Pommer can make better pictures for half the money that Thalberg spends, but has not been allowed by Metro to do so. Thalberg can claim to be a great supervisor when he can duplicate Pommer's feat of using five different directors and little known people and turning out *Variety*, *Faust*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Last Laugh*, *Waltz Dream*, and *Metropolis*.

It will be noticed that J. G. Bachman, who recently has been appointed to supervise the Emil Jannings productions, is at the foot of the supervisors' list. Giving the most inefficient supervisor one of the greatest stars is perhaps the lowest point to which the supervisor system can sink. It emphasizes how wildly absurd the system is.

An interesting feature of the writers' list is that Harry Behn's name ranks the same as Laurence Stallings's. Behn is a new writer who contributed a few scenes to each of two successful pictures, getting credit thereby on the screen for being joint author of them. He has yet to win his spurs as a screen writer, consequently little importance may be attached to the fact that his two pictures give him a higher rating than the authors who have many successful screen stories to their credit.

Norman Webb has compiled his lists as a result of keeping tab on box-office returns for the past eighteen months. A house that does seventy per cent. of its capacity business makes money. The Spectator lists do not go much below seventy per cent., as to publish all the names would occupy too much space. But we have in our possession the rating of every writer, director, supervisor, star, and featured player in the business.

WRITERS

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Fred De Gresac.....	100	30 Al Cohn	76	59 Sylvia Thalberg	72
2 Bess Meredith.....	92	31 Chas. Logue	76	60 Clara Barenger	72
3 Laurence Stallings	91	32 Paul Bern	75	61 Sam Mintz	72
4 Harry Behn	91	33 Josephine Lovett	75	62 Owen Davis	72
5 Frances Marion	88	34 C. Gardner Sullivan.....	75	63 J. Grubb Alexander.....	72
6 John McDermott	87	35 Adelaide Heilbron	75	64 J. Clarkson Miller.....	72
7 Lenore Coffee	86	36 Roland West	75	65 Lillie Hayward	72
8 Dorothy Farnum	86	37 Becky Gardiner	75	66 Al Boasberg	72
9 Elliott Clawson	85	38 Lloyd Corrigan	75	67 Florence Ryerson	71
10 Hans Kraly	84	39 J. Shelly Hamilton.....	75	68 Earl Snell	71
11 Ben Glazer	84	40 Agnes Christine Johnson.....	75	69 Al Lewin	71
12 Loring & Lighton.....	83	41 Elinor Glyn	75	70 Arthur Ripley	71
13 Waldemar Young	82	42 F. McGrew Willis	74	71 Townsend Martin	71
14 Louise Long	81	43 J. Franklin Poland.....	74	72 Violet Powell	71
15 Ethel Dougherty	81	44 Byron Morgan	74	73 Alice D. G. Miller.....	71
16 Forest Halsey	80	45 Jas. Creelman	74	74 Jerome Wilson	71
17 Jas. Donohue	79	46 Max Marcin	74	75 Dorothy Howell	71
18 Jeannie McPherson.....	79	47 Howard Emmet Rogers	74	76 Kate Corbaley	71
19 E. Richard Schayer.....	78	48 Finis Fox	74	77 Gerald Duffy	70
20 Jules Furthman	77	49 Lotta Woods	73	78 Earl Brown	70
21 Winifred Dunn	77	50 Rex Taylor	73	79 Graham Baker	70
22 Lorna Moon	77	51 Elizabeth Meehan	73	80 Al Shelby Levino.....	70
23 Pierre Collings	77	52 John Goodrich	73	81 Agnes Pat McKenna.....	70
24 Carey Wilson	77	53 Lajos Biro	73	82 Tay Garnett	70
25 Julien Josephson	76	54 Wallace Smith	73	83 Fred & Fanny Hatton	70
26 Willis Goldbeck	76	55 Ray Schrock	73	84 Harvey Thew	70
27 Paul Schofield	76	56 Marion Orth	73	85 Doris Anderson	70
28 Daryll F. Zanuck	76	57 Wade Boteler	73	86 Mary O'Hara	70
29 Ray Harris	76	58 June Mathis	72		

SUPERVISORS

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Irving Thalberg	85	10 John McCormick	77	19 Bennie Zeidman	73
2 John Considine Jr.	84	11 Eric Pommer	77	20 C. Gardner Sullivan.....	72
3 Sam Goldwyn	82	12 Wm. Le Baron	76	21 J. Boyce Smith	72
4 Winnie Sheehan	80	13 Al Rockett	76	22 Carey Wilson	72
5 Ben Schulberg	78	14 Hector Turnbull	75	23 Daryl Zanuck	72
6 Lloyd Sheldon	87	15 Harry Rapf	75	24 Hunt Stromberg	71
7 Ralph Block	78	16 Eph. Asher	75	25 Henry Hennigson	71
8 Jack Warner	78	17 Louis Lighton	73	26 Bernie Hymen	71
9 Julian Johnston	78	18 Harry Cohn	73	27 Henry Hobart	70

IN THE last Spectator were published ratings on pictures released during the last eighteen months. In this Spectator we are publishing the box office ratings on supervisors, directors, writers, stars and featured players. The percentages after the names of these different personalities represent their batting averages on all of their releases since the box-office check-up was originated eighteen months ago.

The figures should be studied very carefully to get their real values. For example, Barney Glazer may have *Flesh* and the *Devil* and *Seventh Heaven* listed as 100% capacity business, yet he is only rated at 84% on the writers' list because some of his former weaker releases, such as *Everybody's Acting* (64%) and *The Gay Deceiver* (68%), pull his final average down.

As new box-office figures are received from week to week, the various pictures automatically will be raised or lowered. This applies also to the rating lists for the supervisors, directors, writers, etc.

WRITERS

In our writers' list, we have only listed screen writers, as playwrights' and novelists' box office values will be listed separately at a later date when the statistics are all in and compiled. However, in a few instances where playwrights and novelists have written directly for the screen, they are listed in the scenarists' column as above. It is especially interesting to compare Barney Glazer's rating, 84%, with that of Carey Wilson, 77%, and Daryll Zanuck, 76%.

After Glazer's sweeping success on the *Merry Widow* script, he started out writing scenarios in huge quantities, disregarding quality, with the result that many of them were failures. So he again reversed his writing, and, taking much more time on his scripts, he has written two of the most successful continuities of the year—*Flesh* and the *Devil* and *Seventh Heaven*. Accordingly, he has been rewarded for his great masterpieces by being promoted to a featured unit producer at the Famous studio.

On the other hand, Wilson and Zanuck are both applying Glazer's old tactics of quantity rather than quality to their work. I believe I am quite safe in saying that both Wilson and Zanuck have written and sold almost twice as many screen plays to the First National and Warner studios, to whom they are under contract respectively, than any other writers in the profession. And, besides all of their writing and adapting, they are both supervisors. Wilson is supervisor for *Billie Dove* and *Korda*-all-star units at First National, and Zanuck is associate supervisor of all production at the Warner Brothers' studio,

which is a position similar to that held by Irving Thalberg at M.-G.-M.

By comparing the figures on Glazer's recent releases with those of Carey Wilson's and Zanuck's with those of Thalberg's, one readily sees that it is quality and not quantity that takes the cake in the motion picture industry.

Therefore, I am forced to agree with Mary Pickford's statement at a recent meeting of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, when she said, "The trouble with the picture industry is not a question of salaries, but rather one of so many inferior productions. In other words, we need fewer and better pictures."

SUPERVISORS

The supervisors' rating list seems to prove that the many Irving Thalberg enthusiasts in Hollywood and Culver City are right,—that he is a real genius, even if he is the youngest executive in the motion picture industry. I believe he was 27 years old last March.

While Thalberg heads the supervisors' list at the present time, he is going to have a hard fight during the coming year to stay on top. Johnnie Considine, who rates second to Thalberg, has been batting out some excellent stuff, and if he doesn't let any more pictures like Topsy and Eva come out of the United Artists studio he is going to climb much higher.

In glancing over the supervisors' rating sheet it is very important to consider two things: first, the amount of money allowed to the supervisors per production, and, second, the number of pictures that they are supervising per year.

Thalberg and Ben Schulberg have the biggest executive positions in the industry. They are responsible for the largest number of first-run productions, especially Schulberg, since Paramount has closed its Long Island studio and brought Le Baron here to take charge of its F. B. O. studio.

While Thalberg has more 100% releases than any other supervisor has had or ever may have, he also has allowed a few "lemons" to slip through his fingers, thus tearing his batting average down to 85%. The last "lemon" that went out under Thalberg's supervision was Eddie Goulding's ill-fated production, *Women Love Diamonds*.

After Greta Garbo had said "thumbs down" on this story it was handed to Mae Murray, who in turn said "Adios" and departed for Europe. The picture finally was made with Pauline Starke playing the lead, but her weak box-office value, despite the fact that she is a very clever artiste, plus the very poor story, caused it to flop miserably from coast to coast.

Although the Paramount Production costs have been exceptionally high in the last year, much credit must be given to Ben Schulberg for saving the name Paramount from utter ruin. Approximately 15 months

(Continued on page 19)

SUPERVISORS — Continued

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
28 Lucien Hubbard	70	34 J. D. Williams	68	40 Ray Rockett	67
29 Eddie Montaigne	70	35 Frank Griffin	68	41 Charlie Rogers	66
30 Ray Schrock	70	36 Earl Hudson	68	42 C. C. Burr	63
31 Sam Rork	68	37 June Mathis	67	43 Harry "Joe" Brown	62
32 Robert Kane	68	38 F. McGrew Willis	67	44 Wid Gunning	60
33 Sol Wurtzel	68	39 Mike Levee	67	45 J. G. Bachman	59

DIRECTORS

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 King Vidor	96	32 Fritz Lang	77	63 Roy Del Ruth	*72
2 Fred Niblo	*95	33 Richard Wallace	77	64 E. H. Griffith	72
3 Clarence Brown	*92	34 Allan Dwan	77	65 Robt. Vignola	72
4 Cecil B. de Mille	91	35 Bill Beaudine	-77	66 Rupert Julian	72
5 Geo. Fitzmaurice	-90	36 Rex Ingram	-77	67 Ted Sloman	-72
6 Eddie Sutherland	-88	37 Hobart Henley	76	68 E. Mason Hopper	-72
7 Alan Crossland	-88	38 Frank Lloyd	76	69 Herbert Wilcox	-72
8 Henry King	86	39 Frank Strayer	76	70 Ralph Ince	-72
9 Von Stroheim	85	40 Jack Conway	76	71 Harmon Weight	-72
10 Tod Browning	*84	41 Richard Rosson	-76	72 Rowland Lee	*71
11 Clarence Badger	*84	42 E. A. Dupont	-76	73 J. G. Blystone	*71
12 R. A. Walsh	*83	43 D. W. Griffith	-76	74 James Flood	71
13 Ernst Lubitsch	-83	44 Al Parker	-75	75 Mickey Neilan	71
14 Victor Seastrom	*83	45 Jack Ford	-75	76 Ludwig Berger	71
15 Mauritz Stiller	83	46 Sam Wood	*74	77 James Horne	71
16 James Cruze	-82	47 Art Rosson	74	78 Dorothy Arzner	71
17 Syd Franklin	*81	48 Eddie Clive	74	79 Paul Stein	71
18 Millard Webb	*81	49 Al Green	74	80 Mel Brown	71
19 Frank Borzage	*80	50 Robt. Leonard	74	81 John Stahl	-71
20 John Robertson	*80	51 Howard Hawks	74	82 Donald Crisp	-71
21 Will Nigh	*80	52 Bill Howard	74	83 J. Francis Dillon	*71
22 Mal St. Clair	*79	53 Reg. Barker	74	84 Billy Wellman	*70
23 Roland West	*79	54 Del Lord	-74	85 Maurice Tourneur	70
24 Victor Flemming	79	55 Buchowetzki	-74	86 Svend Gade	70
25 Harry Pollard	79	56 Michael Curtiz	-74	87 Bill Seiter	70
26 Edwin Carewe	*78	57 Frank Tuttle	-74	88 Victor Schertzinger	-70
27 Al Santell	*78	58 Monta Bell	-74	89 Charles Brabin	-70
28 Luther Reed	78	59 Monty Brice	73	90 Syd Olcott	-70
29 Chuck Reisner	78	60 Gregory La Cava	73	91 Sam Taylor	-70
30 F. W. Murnau	*77	61 Frank Capra	-73	92 Ed Goulding	-70
31 Ed Sedgwick	*77	62 Fred Newmeyer	-73	93 Geo. Archainbaud	-70

STARS

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Chas. Chaplin	100	25 Mae Murray	76	49 Eddie Cantor	70
2 Douglas Fairbanks	100	26 Emil Jannings	76	50 Dorothy Gish	70
3 Harold Lloyd	100	27 Constance Talmadge	75	51 Rod La Rocque	70
4 Rudolph Valentino	96	28 Harry Langdon	74	52 Jetta Goudal	70
5 John Barrymore	93	29 Douglas McLean	74	53 Jackie Coogan	69
6 Lon Chaney	92	30 Corinne Griffith	74	54 Laura La Plante	68
7 Norma Talmadge	87	31 Richard Barthelmess	74	55 Geo. Jessel	68
8 John Gilbert	86	32 Milton Sills	74	56 Leatrice Joy	68
9 Greta Garbo	86	33 Thomas Meighan	74	57 Marie Prevost	67
10 Lillian Gish	86	34 Buster Keaton	74	58 Norman Kerry	67
11 Clara Bow	85	35 Pola Negri	74	59 W. C. Fields	67
12 Ronald Colman	85	36 Reginald Denny	73	60 Wm. Boyd	67
13 Colleen Moore	84	37 Charlie Murray	73	61 Edmund Lowe	67
14 Wallace Beery	82	38 Billie Dove	73	62 Irene Rich	67
15 Richard Dix	81	39 Dolores Del Rio	73	63 Geo. O'Brien	66
16 Mary Pickford	81	40 Gilda Gray	73	64 May McAvoy	66
17 Syd Chaplin	80	41 Florence Vidor	73	65 Phyllis Haver	66
18 Marion Davies	80	42 Esther Ralston	72	66 Viola Dana	65
19 Vilma Banky	80	43 Ray Griffith	72	67 Louise Fazenda	65
20 Adolphe Menjou	80	44 Wm. Haines	72	68 Vera Reynolds	64
21 Bebe Daniels	79	45 Raymond Hatton	71	69 Joseph Schildkraut	63
22 Norma Shearer	79	46 Dolores Costello	71	70 Johnny Hines	63
23 Gloria Swanson	79	47 Madge Bellamy	71	71 Monty Banks	61
24 Ramon Navarro	77	48 Monte Blue	70	72 Warner Oland	59

FEATURED PLAYERS

Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Antonio Moreno	69	29 Aileen Pringle	64	57 May Allison	62
2 Joan Crawford	67	30 Betty Bronson	64	58 Shirley Mason	62
3 Jack Mulhall	67	31 Geo. K. Arthur	64	59 Owen Moore	62
4 Lois Moran	67	32 Alice Joyce	64	60 Mary Brian	62
5 Renee Adoree	67	33 Ricardo Cortez	64	61 Anna Q. Nilsson	62
6 Belle Bennett	67	34 Ford Sterling	64	62 Lois Wilson	62
7 Sally O'Neill	67	35 Conway Tearle	64	63 Tom Moore	62
8 Dorothy Mackaill	66	36 Lya De Putti	64	64 Pauline Starke	62
9 Charlie Ray	66	37 Clive Brook	64	65 Louise Brooks	62
10 Louise Dresser	66	38 Neil Hamilton	64	66 Greta Nissen	62
11 Lloyd Hughes	66	39 James Hall	64	67 Henry B. Walthall	62
12 Mary Astor	66	40 Conrad Nagel	64	68 Kenneth Harlan	62
13 Noah Beery	66	41 Lionel Barrymore	63	69 Andre Beranger	62
14 Lars Hanson	66	42 Eleanor Boardman	63	70 Hobart Bosworth	62
15 Geo. Bancroft	66	43 Claire Windsor	63	71 Wm. Powell	62
16 Janet Gaynor	66	44 Blanche Sweet	63	72 Roy D'Arcy	61
17 Lewis Stone	66	45 Red Grange	63	73 Percy Marmont	61
18 Geo. Sydney	65	46 Gary Cooper	63	74 Malcolm McGregor	61
19 Lew Cody	65	47 Jean Hersholt	63	75 Lowell Sherman	61
20 Alice Terry	65	48 Lilyan Tashman	63	76 Francis X. Bushman	61
21 Chester Conklin	65	49 Buster Collier	63	77 John Bowers	61
22 Alma Rubens	65	50 Ken Maynard	62	78 Marion Nixon	61
23 Lawrence Gray	65	51 Ben Lyon	62	79 Bessie Love	61
24 Victor McLaglen	65	52 Doris Kenyon	62	80 Robert Edeson	60
25 Leon Errol	64	53 Warner Baxter	62	81 Carmel Myers	60
26 Chas. Farrell	64	54 Estelle Taylor	62	82 Ernest Torrence	60
27 Jack Holt	64	55 Patsy Ruth Miller	62	83 Vera Gordon	60
28 Zasu Pitts	64	56 Eugene O'Brien	62	84 Holbrook Blinn	60
				85 Evelyn Brent	60

Clara Bow in Hopeless Mess

(Continued from page 11)

the dog would have returned home after treeing the cat he was chasing. In the second place, he would have swam ashore as soon as he fell into the water, and would not have made for the middle of the stream as he does in the picture. In the third place, he could rescue himself a great deal easier than a man could have rescued him. I hope that in Bebe Daniels' latest picture we do not have a scene showing her plunging into the water to save Gertrude Ederle from drowning. It would be on a par with the dog scene in Hula. The only convincing performance in the Bow picture, though, is contributed by the dog. All the humans have ridiculous characterizations. The whole production is full of absolute rot, and the titles that were in it when I saw it aggravate the rest of its faults. Most of them were absurd. I can not understand how a studio can be sufficiently shortsighted as to present a girl star who is riding high on the wave of popularity in a picture so utterly devoid of common sense, good taste, and moral tone.

* * *

"Rolled Stockings" Is a Poor Picture

ONE of the myteries of Rolled Stockings is its title. "Pickled Pigs' Feet" would have been just as appropriate. Another mystery is why it was made. The story is ridiculous, and the picture gives the impression that the director and the cast knew it was and worked with the single aim of getting through with it. The main weakness of Richard Rosson's direction was his disposition to line up his characters facing the camera. This is a habit that a great many directors have, apparently because someone started doing it a long time ago. No scene can be more natural than the grouping of the characters in it. In the final fade-out David Torrence, Louise Brooks, James Hall, and Richard Arlen have a get-together session at a railway station. They stand in a straight line facing the camera, an utterly absurd way of presenting them. And even if it were permissible on the ground of naturalness, it is not as effective as if the three young people had faced the father, allowing the camera to register the action by showing their backs. Rolled Stockings has a close-up debauch to its discredit, although Bud Lighton's indulgence in this editorial weakness is not quite as wild as Lloyd Sheldon's in *The Whirlwind of Youth*. If the simple rule of applying reason to the use of close-ups were adopted in motion picture studios we would have more pictures displaying intellectual treatment. The opening sequence in *Rolled Stockings* shows the home of two boys about to leave for college. Their father and mother are in the scenes with them. It is shown almost entirely in close-ups, thus getting away entirely from the spirit of the sequence. A family is an entity and when one is shown on the screen solely to establish the family idea the illusion is weakened by close-ups which show the different characters as individuals instead of as parts of something that an effort is being made to present as a whole. The group idea should not be destroyed. Some of the close-ups containing the heads of two people add a humorous touch to this picture. In order to get them within the frame and retain the huge proportions of the

heads, the characters have to stand so close together that their noses almost touch while they talk. Such ridiculous scenes are things that make movies out of what might have been motion pictures. If you have not seen this picture you will realize to what extreme the close-up evil is carried when I tell you that at times even Louise Brooks's legs are cut out in order to give the audience stupendous views of her features. Although it is a college picture, there is no real college atmosphere in it. A long initiation sequence is utterly devoid of either entertainment or humor. In a boat race sequence yell leaders do their daily dozens in front of groups of elderly people who make no response whatever. Dick Arlen, stroke of his crew, a manly chap who takes to drink on the eve of his race because Louise is going to marry his brother, wears a heavy sweater while rowing in the race. This is the only new thing in the picture, the only thing that never was done before on the screen or in a boat race. Paramount must be hard up for stories when it has to fall back on one which builds its main situation on the fact that the stroke of a crew on the eve of a great race throws down his college by breaking training. It is unheard of. But, anyway, the titles in *Rolled Stockings* are punctuated properly. It is the only thing to the picture's credit. There is not one single good performance in it.

* * *

Paramount seems to be having quite a time choosing someone to play the blonde whom gentlemen prefer. Unless it makes of the Anita Loos story a better picture than it has been averaging lately I can't see that it makes much difference who plays the part. Why not let me play it?

RUPERT JULIAN

DIRECTOR

--

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THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

Lewis Stone Is a Poor Headwaiter

THE principal fault of *The Prince of Headwaiters* is that he is a very poor headwaiter. He does not act at all like one. In *Service for Ladies* Adolphe Menjou plays a similar role and acts like a headwaiter. The almost simultaneous releases of these two pictures offered an interesting opportunity for comparisons between the work of Menjou and Lewis Stone. The honors go to Menjou. When he shows diners to their tables he is a waiter escorting patrons of the restaurant; when Stone performs the same service he is a bank president out of his element. But perhaps he realized that he was being badly directed, and was being called upon to do things that he should not do. He is introduced in a sequence that goes to ridiculous excess in planting his wealth and fame as a maitre d' hotel, and when he reaches the restaurant over which he presides we see him performing duties that maitres d' hotel or headwaiters never perform. They do not show patrons to their tables. That is left to the captains. John Francis Dillon did not direct one restaurant scene in a convincing manner. To be consistent with the character given Stone the restaurant should have reflected the ultimate in service, wealth and dignity. Instead it is conducted like an ordinary road-house, with open drinking, cheek-to-cheek dancing and other lowbrowisms foreign to the atmosphere that the picture endeavors to create. None of the finesse of d'Arrast's direction of the restaurant scenes in *Service for Ladies* is apparent in the *First National* picture. One thing, though, for which Dillon is to be commended is his appreciation of the value of long shots in telling the story. Anyone with any picture sense knows that as much can be told with the full figures of the characters as with their faces, and when the full figures are used, more of the pictorial value of the scenes is retained. The reason that this obvious truth is not more in evidence on the screen is the lack of picture sense by those who make the pictures. No really intelligently made picture would have more than half a dozen close-ups in it. There are more than that in the Stone picture, but as most of them are used in scenes in which Ann Rork, daughter of the producer, appears, it would be unfair to charge them against Dillon. If Sam Rork intends to keep his daughter in pictures he should abandon this close-up habit before it jells. In a literary way this picture has as many faults as it has technically. When a young wife is torn out of the arms of a man she loves it is unreasonable to ask us to believe that she would not find some way of letting her husband know that a son had been born to him, or, at least, that one was on the way. When the husband followed his wife to America, where her family is a notable one, it seems unreasonable that he did not make enquiries about her that would have led him to discover the existence of a son. When he finds he has a son he indulges in no heroics when the young man, ignorant of the relationship, goes beyond his range of vision for the first few times after he makes the discovery. But when the son is out of trouble and is leaving New York for Boston, to marry the nice girl he loves, a girl who knows Stone is her fiance's father, he almost succumbs to his grief. The farewell is a most pathetic one on the part of the father. Why then and at no previous time? The whole idea of the closing scene is wrong.

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Stone should have been happy. And having the girl spot him as the boy's father is absurd as well as unnecessary. She had nothing to go on, and it looked to me like a deliberate attempt to fatten a part for the producer's daughter. But we can't blame Ann, who is quite a sweet looking youngster.

* * *

Lonesome Ladies is the product of an effort by First National to make a motion picture out of nothing except a cast. It can't be done. Lonesome Ladies proves it. It is composed entirely of trivialities, and the time spent in viewing it is a total loss, even though Anna Q. Nilsson, Jane Winton, Doris Lloyd, Fritzie Ridgeway, Lewis Stone, Edward Martindel and several others do their darndest to make something of it. Joe Henabery directed it with all his might, but succeeded only in making it mildly irritating and yawnish. Among the small army of people given credit for being responsible for it appears the name of somebody as comedy constructionist, or something to that effect. It is the only amusing comedy in the film. Every time I see such credit on the screen I wonder afresh if the producers can realize how absurd it is and how ridiculous it makes both them and the production. It is their confession that they have a story so weak that they must employ some weird chap to make it so silly that the weakness won't be noticed. The screen should not advertise the fact that it has degenerated to a lowbrow imitation of art. Fortunately the comedy constructionist does no harm to Lonesome Ladies. The credit title is the only evidence that he was on the pay-roll. No picture can be greater than its principal motivating action. In this picture Miss Nilsson leaves her husband for a reason so trivial that her action is absurd, and a story built on an absurdity is in itself absurd. The only interesting feature of it is the wonder it causes over the fact that a producing organization can be so devoid of brains as to produce it. The titles were very good. They were written by Dwinelle Benthall and Rufus McCosh.

* * *

Just why *Naughty, But Nice*? There isn't a single thing about it that justifies its production. Within certain limits Colleen Moore is a clever little trouper. In this picture she does nothing that an extra girl could not do after five or six times before the camera. As always Colleen is surrounded with a capable cast, and the production is entirely satisfying, but where the story should be is a large void. It is just about the silliest drivel I ever saw masquerading as screen entertainment. Every situation in it is forced, and it has the fatal weakness of being based on a misunderstanding that never would have arisen if Colleen's characterization had been one of a girl with operating mental faculties. The love theme is developed by spontaneous combustion in the author's brain, not by a succession of scenes that make it plausible. All the comedy is borrowed from slapstick two-reelers. In the past I have praised Colleen's ability as a pantomimist. In this picture she indulges in some pantomime and I had no idea what she was driving at. The whole thing is a perfect example of what we may expect from the huddle system, by which the whole production staff has a hand in it. It even had a gag man, a terrible handicap to any picture. Colleen needs only a couple more pictures like *Naughty, But Nice* and her box office value will be as extinct as the dodo.



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Apparently the advertisements that the Runyadha people are running in The Spectator are attracting considerable attention. For the information of those who have made enquiries we might state that the advertisement in this issue is the third of a series that will continue for some time, and when they have been completed they will be published in a pamphlet. The interest that the advertisements have aroused would indicate that screen people have heard so much about economy of late that they are about ready to apply it to their personal affairs. Certainly it appears as if they have been paying a lot more than they should for their life insurance.

* * *

An article on how money is squandered in motion pictures, written by the editor of The Spectator, will appear in the September number of the American Mercury, on the newsstands August 25. The first of a series of articles on the same subject and by the same writer, will appear in the October number of Vanity Fair, on the newsstands September 20.

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Yet these are the men into whose hands you commit the creation of an estate, running into hundreds of thousands of dollars, and it would be amusing were it not pathetic, to think of one gravely and solemnly discussing questions, highly technical and involving large sums with another who yesterday might have been the local iceman, milkman, or the butcher's errand boy.

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Their success is therefore no evidence whatever of their knowledge of the business, and represents only their ability to sell the glowing promises which companies hold out, the analysis of which invariably causes the purchaser to laugh at his own simplicity and gullability.

No less absurd is the system so frequently employed, of referring these highly technical questions to a Manager whose knowledge is even more limited than that of "The Company Agent".

Would you consult your manager on a matter of Obstetrics, and what obstetrician would confer on such a matter with such third party, even if he be an innocent third party.

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PRODUCTION VALUES

By MARY O'HARA

CAN pictures be made more cheaply without injuring their quality? If so, how? One way occurs to me. A personal anecdote will explain it.

I once turned in a story to a producer, treating a certain theme which had been decided on. The director was delighted with it, the producer equally so. Other opinions were taken and the verdict was that the story had unusual values of drama and entertainment. Finally the producer turned to me and with rather a shame-faced grin, said:

"There's only one thing the matter with it. It doesn't cost enough money."

There was a chorus of boos at him, but he stuck to it. Sequences which were not in the least necessary must be introduced in order to give opportunity for more expensive sets.

I am sure all screen writers have had the same experience. "Production values", the producers call them, and demand that every script shall contain them.

* * *

This is not as insane as it sounds. The picture salesmen judge of the value of a picture by what it has cost, and they set its selling price at a suitable profit over its cost. If it cost little they can not ask so much for it, because the exhibitor, seeing a picture, can count up the approximate cost of sets, actors and props, and judge entirely by those visible, material values. He does not even consider the invisible, spiritual values of beauty, charm, vitality, interest and feeling. Working backwards from this, producers have fallen in line and have adopted the practice of making pictures cost more so that they can ask more for them.

It is easy to see how such a system of selling has grown up. It has always been safer to bet that a picture was going to be bad—namely, that it would have none of those "invisible values"—than that it would be good. So the idea of real merit was left out of the bargain from the beginning and the basis of payment was simply that of actual cost and reasonable profit. When such pictures as *Over the Hill* or *The Miracle Man* came along, pictures crammed full of "invisible values" but of moderate cost, they were considered exceptions and in no way altered the accepted methods of selling.

* * *

It appears that producers have now decided to make pictures cost less. If they really mean this—if they ask writers to prepare scripts which call for less lavishness and positively no unnecessary expense, they will get them. There is no difficulty about that; and by that one stroke alone picture costs can be greatly decreased. (I will not mention the saving by elimination of waste and inefficiency, which is another subject altogether.)

But what now about "production values"? If the material and visible

values are not so overwhelmingly present, there must be the other, the invisible, spiritual values. In a word, if pictures are to be cheaper, they must be better. More than this, the exhibitor will have to pay for those invisible values just as he has always paid for the visible values. Among the many conferences being held at present, the producer should be having conferences with his salesmen and theatre owners, devising some plan of selling on merit instead of on actual cost. But to return to the important point, how can the producer be sure that he will have that merit to sell? I have a theory for achieving this with more certainty than heretofore.

* * *

My theory is that in the making of a picture, four different creative abilities are needed: that of writer, playwright, director, and photographic artist.

I say writer; meaning one who can describe human beings as they are, and who is prolific in the flow of ideas and the creation of plots, situations, characters, business, etc.

* * *

I say playwright. It is not generally considered necessary to have playwrights for the screen. This is an appalling error. It has cost the industry millions of dollars and is, I think, the one greatest single cause of bad pictures. A playwright knows that he has to get his stuff over within certain limits of time or footage and that if there are large deletions his picture or play suffers. The playwright does not begin a piece of work and find out in the middle of it that he has no story. He knows when he has a story to tell and how to tell it within limits. He knows what the point is, and he is aiming at that point from the very start.

He may not be very creative in the way that a brilliant writer is—he may not have an endless flow of ideas and inspirations, but he has the definite scientific knowledge which will enable him to take the material provided him by a book or play or by another writer and so arrange and construct and balance it as to get the greatest possible effectiveness within the prescribed limits. Writing a novel is creating without limits; therefore no playwright is needed. Writing a play or picture is creating within limits; therefore a playwright is essential.

* * *

To be a playwright one needs, to begin with, a certain type of mind—critical, analytical and patient; and one needs training, either from experience or association and study with other playwrights. Some of the most brilliant writers never could become playwrights. In fact, their very fluency, supplying them with an endless stream of material and urging them on to ever more and more creation, works against the achievement of balance, or the possibility of it. A

picture must have both a writer and a playwright, either in one person or in two working together.

Most screen writers are not playwrights. Those who have the necessary qualifications of mind have not had the training. They have learned continuity-writing from studio experience and from meeting the demands of directors, producers and supervisors. But even if a continuity-writer were an accomplished playwright as well, producers and directors would for the most part not know the difference. They do not know that they need playwrights.

However, truth will out. Pictures need playwrights. Eventually this will be known and admitted. There will then be a demand for them, and those screen writers who have a natural bent that way will develop this ability and become playwrights. Those who have not should know that it is for them to create, but not to have the final say in construction, and should never work on a picture except in collaboration with a playwright.

This function of playwright, requiring as it does, a rare type of mind, literary ability of a high order, exhaustive training, and a profound knowledge of human nature and life, is one which, at present, the executives of the industry attempt to fill. The results speak for themselves.

* * *

I say director; meaning one who is expert at handling actors, causing them to express correctly the thoughts and feelings which are specified.

* * *

I say photographic artist. Beauty on the screen should be more highly valued and more sought after than it is. The Germans and Swedes in their high class pictures never miss it. It gives such a richness and polish and class to a production that even if the picture is otherwise without merit, one is still obliged to praise it; for genius, of a certain kind at least, has been shown forth. No picture should be without it. But unfortunately the majority of cameramen have not the understanding of light and composition which produces this beauty. They understand the mechanics and technique of their business, but are not artists and can not create real beauty.

There are, happily, some exceptions to this statement—some cameramen who are real artists and prove it by the beauty they achieve on the screen. But in cases where the cameraman lacks this ability, and the director also, there should be on the set when the picture is made, some man who is a photographic artist. I know of one case where a director asked an artist friend to work by his side on a picture and to supervise the lighting and composition. The result was a picture so beautiful that all the studio made pilgrimages to the projection-room to see it. It cost very little additional money to have that artist on the set.

There are many such artists in Hollywood, so many that it is a certainty that nothing but a lack of the realization of the need of their serv-

THE STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

(Continued from page 13)

ices on the part of producers and directors ever permits the making of a picture as uninteresting photographically as, let us say, Mr. Wu. It is evident that no expense was spared to get beauty in this picture. The sets were lavish and showed a world of care, but still there was no beauty. There couldn't be. Beauty doesn't exist in a picture by itself, or by luck, it has to be put there by an artist. There was not a photographic artist on the job.

* * *

These four then, writer, playwright, director and photographic artist. The playwright will do the cutting, either actually or in a supervisory capacity and the writer will do the titling. And it should be known of writers and directors, which of these gifts they have, and not taken for granted that they have them all; that because a man is a fine director, he is also a playwright and perhaps a photographic artist into the bargain.

* * *

Let us suppose, for instance, that the producer has bought a book by Ibanez to screen. Ibanez is the writer. No other writer is needed. Material is there in plenty. All that is needed is a playwright to arrange and construct it. But the producer does not reason this way. He argues that this is going to be a big and important production and he must get a writer with a big and important name. He selects one. It is possible, of course, that this writer is also a playwright, in which case all will go well—that is, if the writer is allowed to do his work without interference.

But suppose that this writer is not a playwright at all? Inevitably his creative gift will oppose itself to the material Ibanez created, and instead of subordinating himself and arranging what is already there, he will give his inspiration free rein and will come near to writing a new story, which will then be just as much in need of the work of a playwright as the original novel was. How often has this happened? And an amazed public wonders why.

Let us suppose an opposite case. A director goes to the producer with an "idea" which is promising. The producer looks around for a writer. In this case he must have a writer and a playwright. A playwright alone might not be sufficient—not creative enough. Equipped with both he is certain of achieving all the success which the original idea permits of.

* * *

This, then, is my theory: Four artists on every picture, possibly in two persons, or in three, but the abilities must be there; for it is these abilities which will put into the picture the invisible production values—the drawing, vital element which attracts the public and makes for financial success.

It is interesting to inspect some prominent personalities of the industry, analyzing their abilities according to this formula. At "Mr. Spectator's" request, I will do this in a subsequent issue.

ago, the pictures coming out of the Paramount studios were so very poor that even the Publix houses were turning them down. The Publix booking situation had even reached the point where Sam Katz told Zukor that he seriously was considering booking the M.-G.-M. product solid for the entire Publix chain.

Of course, when Schulberg took over the studio and partially reversed the tables by procuring some high class program pictures starring Beery and Hatton, Clara Bow, Bebe Daniels, Adolphe Menjou and other Paramount stars, he saved the situation.

If Schulberg's road-shows, *Old Ironsides* and *The Rough Riders*, hadn't both flopped, the Paramount organization would be in a very healthy condition, despite the very high production costs on some of their program pictures. However, the gross receipts on *Beau Geste* and *Wings* will probably offset any loss of the two former road shows mentioned.

So, taking it all in all, Paramount is in a much better condition than it was at this time last year. The year 1926 was the first that the Famous Players' net was over five and one-quarter millions. They have sixty more Publix theatres than they had at this time last year, the biggest of which is doing a weekly average business of \$67,000, and the Paramount foreign sales have jumped about 40% in the last eighteen months.

Since Jesse Lasky says we must economize and possibly cut down to two meals a day, we all begin to wonder just why. Perhaps it is because most of the Paramount flops, namely the W. C. Fields, Ed Wynn, and Junior Star pictures, are due directly to him.

If Lasky would forget that Paramount has five hundred and sixty Publix theatres in the United States, one hundred and nine theatres in the Canadian Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, and a third interest in Ufa's two hundred and forty theatres—thus assuring him of his production cost before a picture is even started, no matter how poor it may be—he would undoubtedly strive to turn out fewer and better box-office pictures as Paramount used to do in the old days before it had the theatre monopoly.

DIRECTORS

Considering the fact that approximately 70% capacity business is the flop-line in the average motion picture theatre, I have rated all directors whose releases over the past eighteen months have averaged 70% or better. This same applies to the writers' list.

An asterisk (*) after the director's name in question means that either his last release or his current production shows signs of improving; while a minus sign (—) means that he is at present on the decline.

The directors who seem to be climb-

ing most rapidly lately are, Clarence Brown, Clarence Badger, Mauritz Stiller, Frank Borzage, Luther Reed, Will Nigh, Edwin Carewe and Ed Sedgwick.

Clarence Brown's rise to the third most consistent box-office director in the industry has been remarkable indeed. Because of his contract expiring with M.-G.-M., the eyes of the industry are on him, and it is quite probable that he will go over to his logical place with United Artists.

Clarence Badger, although an old-time director, has only recently climbed to the high rank he now holds, which he has attained by directing the most successful pictures that both Clara Bow and Bebe Daniels have ever appeared in.

Mauritz Stiller's great success on his first effort for Famous Players, *Hotel Imperial*, has been quite a surprise to all concerned. He is one of the few directors who was a complete failure under Irving Thalberg's supervision, who had him withdrawn from *The Temptress* after that picture was four weeks in production, and yet made good under the Ben Schulberg regime.

I have already commented on Frank Borzage's success with *Seventh Heaven*, and only hope that he is able to get another story as entertaining as this one.

Luther Reed's success, like that of Roland West, Howard Hawks, Monta Bell, Monte Price and a lot of other former scenarists, goes to prove that one of the best places to draw directors from is within the ranks of the scenario writers. Reed, for seven years a prominent screen writer, has

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been especially successful in his direction of several of the Menjou and Vidor starring vehicles.

Will Nigh, who made a poor start with M.-G.-M. by directing the Fire Brigade, which, although a very fine picture, was not a financial success, has reversed his luck at the box-office with Mr. Wu. With the exception of Tell It to the Marines, Mr. Wu has been Lon Chaney's most successful picture of the year. Accordingly, Nigh is to be entrusted with the direction of another M.-G.-M. special, Rose Marie, which I hope M.-G.-M. will carry out their original intention of filming in Technicolor. Much credit for the success of Doug Fairbanks' Black Pirate was owing to the beautiful natural color photography by Henry Sharp, who, by the way, is now under contract to M.-G.-M.

Eddie Carewe's big box-office hit, Resurrection, has been quite a revelation to the producers, and especially to First National. The last two pictures that Carewe produced and released through First National barely clicked at the box-office. In fact, it is doubtful whether they will do much more than pay for themselves, if they do that much.

Resurrection has won for Carewe a new reputation as a box-office director, and accordingly he has been handed a new contract by United Artists, for whom he will shortly produce Ramona, starring his very successful protege, Dolores Del Rio.

STARS

In gazing over the star rating list, one will observe that there are only three stars who are universally a 100% draw, and that these three, Chaplin, Fairbanks and Lloyd, have all held their top positions for many years.

When Valentino passed away, his box-office draw was around 88% and was climbing gradually toward the 100% line. Upon his death, his draw jumped to 96% almost over night, which resulted in the re-issuing of several of his former pictures.

Undoubtedly one of the newest and most sensational box-office attractions on the star list is Greta Garbo, who, although practically unknown a year ago, has jumped up to the ninth position as a box-office draw. This is the first time in the history of motion pictures that a star has been developed so rapidly and with only three releases.

Much credit for her rapid rise should go not only to the Metro-Goldwyn studios intact, but also to Howard Deitz and Pete Smith, Eastern and Western publicity directors respectively for M.-G.-M., who have certainly helped to make the company they are working for foremost as big star-makers. Possibly that is why Marcus Loew and Louis B. Mayer are paying these two exploiters bigger salaries than they are to some of their directors. Evidently publicity is still the life-blood of the motion picture industry.

However, since most of us know

who the big box-office stars are and not so much about the small ones, the bottom end of this list is much more interesting. Three producers, P. D. C., Warners and Universal, all have several star names near the bottom of this list, which is only natural, since they are weaker releases as compared to the big three, and are naturally trying to create new stars.

FEATURED PLAYERS

This list of featured players includes all contract—or free-lance—artists whose box-office draws have been averaging 60% or over. This list should prove valuable to anyone interested in pictures, as the future stars of the industry will be drawn from those who rate highest on this list and continue to do so over a series of their releases.

Antonio Moreno, who recently returned from abroad where he appeared in *Madame Pompadour* for British National Pictures, heads the list and seems to be the next possible candidate for stardom. Since Tony has been back home for over a month and as yet has signed no contract, I was under the impression that he was holding out for a big salary. But I have just been informed, though unofficially, that the famous Mr. Moreno has decided that he wants to become a director. Maybe Tony thinks that he can improve the recent general depression in the studios by directing a picture or two. Yet, since he is so popular at the box-office right now, I would advise him to stick to the grease-paint angle.

Jack Mulhall, Joan Crawford and Lois Moran are among the most rapid climbers of the established featured players.

Mulhall has three more co-starring pictures to make with Dorothy Mackaill and then is to be starred by First National.

Joan Crawford, although listed as an M.-G.-M. featured player, was practically starred in her two last releases, *The Taxi Dancer* and *The Understanding Heart*, both of which stood up remarkably well at the box-office considering there was no special merit to either production. Since she is Harry Rapf's protege, we hear that he has big plans for her and will star her ere long.

Lois Moran, who was the sensation of 1926, as the little daughter in *Stella Dallas*, has certainly made good in every sense of the word. Although a free-lance player for the past fourteen months, she has just been signed

up by Winnie Sheehan on a five-year starring contract for Fox.

Needless to say, when *Seventh Heaven* is released generally, Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell will shoot right up on the featured players' list, and I would not be at all surprised to see them both jump over to the star rating list, next year.

SLAMMING THE STARS

Besides making motion picture producers ridiculous, the only other result that the recent abortive attempt to reduce salaries has accomplished was to stir the newspapers of the country to make unkind references to the stars. The papers, with extraordinary unanimity, have ignored the fact that the cut was to affect all classes of picture people, and have directed their caustic remarks at the players only. But the stars bowed as low as all the rest of them at the Biltmore banquet.

KARLE KARPE

Advertising Illustrator
Westmore 2558

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LEGAL CONTROVERSY

Dear Mr. Beaton:

In The Spectator of July 23, under the heading "What You Should Know About the Law", Attorney Roger Marchetti makes a statement that requires some elucidation. In the second paragraph he states:

"It was charged by Joseph Grubb Alexander, Ernest R. Schayer, and Wilfrid North, complainants, that Sidney Howard had plagiarized Miss Lyons's (deceased) plot, The Full of the Moon, in his play, They Knew What They Wanted."

I should like to know this much about the law: Why should Alexander, Schayer and North bring suit against Howard for plagiarizing someone else's plot? Miss Lyons (deceased) had been a play reader, I understood, for the New York Theatre Guild, and before her decease denied ever having seen the play entitled The Full of the Moon.

Judge Augustus N. Hand, having read both plays, stated that "the two plays were similar, but the incidents not so uncommon as to give rise to any suspicion of a steal".

As a matter of fact, the incident on which the plot of The Full of the Moon is based is so unusual that when a scenario writer from Hollywood saw Howard's play in New York she came back West and said to the complainants, "I have seen your play."

Any scenario writer knows how simple it is to dress the characters in different costumes, give them different names and foreign environment, and defy an author to recognize his own child; but given a situation unique and basic the transformation becomes evident. This is one thing a judge in New York, well versed in law, might learn from Hollywood writers well versed in story.

What is the use of copyright law unless one's work is to be protected? The Full of the Moon was copyrighted one year before Howard's play was produced.

For a small sum of money a transcript of any play in the Congressional Library can be obtained and any unprincipled person can re-habilitate an idea and sell it as his own, unless the copyright law is upheld by the courts. That's something else I should like to know about the law.

But don't let any of your readers imagine from the article published on July 23 that the complainants used Miss Lyons's (deceased) plot. That plot was ours, every word written in Hollywood, and copyrighted in good faith.

WILFRID NORTH.

A COMPARISON

Dear Editor:

I notice in The Film Spectator of July 23 your article headed "Colman Great in Magic Flame."

Did you see The Night of Love, with Colman and Vilma Banky? If

so, you will remember that she jumps through a large window to the sea as did Colman in Magic Flame. The picture, to my mind, could be improved if the prince could die some other way, as the two pictures are too nearly alike to follow each other so closely. Also, if the circus clown allowed himself to take the place of a prince, don't you think it is a bit late for him to try to run away after being denounced by a woman as an impostor, inasmuch as she has been convinced that it is her mistake? Possibly those few scenes where he runs across the lawn to the gate could be left out with advantage. Both stars, however, did very good work in the picture, the fault being in the scenario.

H. G. BENNETT.

MESSAGE WEAKENED

Dear Mr. Beaton:

In the current number of the Film Mercury is an article on the Scenario, by Jas. P. Calhoun, in which he places Barbed Wire among the scenario triumphs.

I take issue with this statement, primarily on the grounds that the story is in no sense screen material. The apparent theme is the hatred of Mona and her compatriots for the Boche, and its ultimate conquest. The theme, as carried out, leads to nothing more than purely mental action, and the only demonstration of this seems to be nothing more than Mona's stolid refusal to smile at the antics of the German buffoon. That she falls in love with a Boche does not mean that she extends that love to his fellows, but confines it to that individual Boche. So far the theme falls flat. We are not clearly shown that she defends the Boche when he is found guilty unjustly—which latter, by the way, deprives the situation of a lot of its drama. But we can see that her defense of him is the result of a predilection in his favor.

The "comic relief", though out of place in pictures of this type, is nevertheless legitimate in this case, as it tends to work out the theme. But why, in God's name, is it necessary to inject slapstick by running the man through the threshing machine? This has not even the excuse

of legitimacy, as Mona is off stage when it happens.

And finally, what excuse can you find for the climax? The only lesson the movies can teach us is an object lesson, which does not consist in the screening of a dozen preachy titles which fail to leave us convinced that the French people are ready to open their arms to their enemy.

That this climax follows the story is no reason to retain it, for it is

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weak enough to damn a much better picture than *Barbed Wire*, which I consider just an average movie, and certainly not worth the lavish encomiums it has received.

Neither do I think that Pola Negri is congenially cast; though, like the finished artiste she is, she is perfectly adequate. Repression is not her forte, as a study of all her most successful pictures — *Passion*, *One Arabian Night*, and *Carmen*, especially the latter—will prove.

To me, *Hotel Imperial* and *Forbidden Paradise* are the only two American pictures in which she has appeared at her best.

Suppose they had wound up the *Barbed Wire* picture by showing the brother led back by a German woman who had nursed and then married him we would, at least, have had an object lesson with which to climax the story. Of course, these are merely my own conclusions drawn from the picture, and I give them for what they are worth. The picture is an ambitious endeavor and therefore invites criticism.

F. ELY PAGET.

WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN

Dear Mr. Beaton:

In your issue of *The Spectator* of July 23 you took occasion to speak meritoriously of *The Other Side*, a small, independent shoe-string production, as in comparison to *When a Man Loves*, a Warner Bros. super-special.

You must know the value of a word of praise from yourself to the small strivers, and I, therefore, feel sure that you will give heed to the plaint of a team of plodding free lance writers—Marion Ward and May McLean.

The Other Side is an original story written directly for the screen, and the script was shot as written. Ask Ernie Van Pelt—he knows.

We turned out the original story and continuity in less than a week—four days and nights, to be exact. Which shows that those who write for the small independents have to “step on it” a bit.

And even at that we find spare moments in which to bombard busy editors with bum verse—a sin I promise never again to commit if you will only give us credit for *The Other Side*.

Thanking you for past courtesies,
MAY McLEAN.

SPECTATOR'S POET

The *Film Spectator* is proud of its poet, George F. Magoffin. Every week for a long time I have looked on the poetry page of the *Literary Digest* expecting to find one of his clever contributions reproduced. I was rewarded in the issue of the *Digest* of July 30. His “Well! Well!” was given national recognition—the one beginning, “Did you ever feel an impulse in your heart, dear, to hit a movie actor in the eye?” In spite of its somewhat facetious beginning, it is a thoughtful protest against so much typical movie stuff in pictures.

NOTHING TO STOP THEM

However, if Jesse Lasky and Louis B. Mayer are at all put out over the failure of the salary cut to click, there is nothing in the world to prevent them from carrying out their expressed intentions of cutting their own.

TRIBUTE TO HOSPITALITY

Carl Van Vechten, the well known novelist, says in a recent *Vanity Fair* that after dining with the Laskys he drove to the opening of *Old Ironsides* through two miles of streets that were lined ten-deep on both sides with people who cheered Mary Pickford. If I knew just where I stood with Jesse I'd ask him to give me the telephone number of his bootlegger.

AN AWFUL THREAT

According to *The Daily Film Renter* of London, Carl Laemmle has decided to make in Europe a picture with an all-royal cast, every member of it to be someone with a genuine title. Why go to such extreme lengths? Aren't pictures bad enough now? My only hope is that he engages Von Stroheim to direct it. That would save us from the necessity of viewing it for at least a couple of years.

SPECTATOR'S HALL OF FAME

On the walls of the room in which I think out things that I write for *The Spectator* hang framed, autographed photographs of those whose performances on the screen I like and whom I am happy to number among my friends. There recently has come to dwell among them one which draws my gaze most often. In a silvered frame there is a face, a beautiful one, that reflects both wistfulness and content, spirituality with a suggestion of humor, sweet girlishness mixed with the poise of maturity. In the corner is written in a hand that is sure of itself, this inscription: “To Welford Beaton, whose review of *Seventh Heaven* has created yet another Para-

dise for little Diane. Sincerely, Janet Gaynor.” Ever since it has been hanging in its place I have been endeavoring to sum up enough modesty to keep me from telling you about it.

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It is going to be made larger still. It is going to add features that will necessitate an increase in size.

With the last issue it inaugurates a department that will be of incalculable value to the motion picture industry—**The Story of the Box Office**, told in every issue by the figures compiled by Norman Webb.

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The increase will go into effect in the United States on September 1st, and to allow our readers in Canada, England, France, and Germany full time to renew before the advance, the foreign rate will be increased on October 1st.

Until the dates specified we will accept renewals and new subscriptions at the present price, \$3.50 domestic, and \$4.50 foreign.

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will be 20c the copy

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LETTER TO ROOSEVELT HOTEL

By SID GRAUMAN

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August 11, 1927.

Mr. Hugh A. Beaton, Jr.,
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Dear Mr. Beaton:

I have just returned to Grauman's Chinese Theatre from a tour of inspection of the new, magnificent Roosevelt Hotel and to say that I am pleased with Hollywood's latest, splendid hotel structure is putting it mildly.

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I am sure it will be a hotel of which not alone Hollywood, but all of California and the entire west can well be proud, and an architectural triumph that will be famed throughout the civilized world.

In looking over the artistic furnishings and charming decorations I know that no expense or pains is being spared to make it a high class, distinctive institution, with every modern comfort and luxury the mind of man can conceive.

That it will be maintained on a plane to satisfy the most fastidious and exacting under your capable direction, I feel sure, from the success you have made of similar institutions in the past.

Please accept my heartiest congratulations and sincerest wishes for the new Roosevelt Hotel, as well as my thanks as a Hollywood booster, for what I believe will mark a great step in advance in the business and social life of the world's film capital.

Sincerely yours,

Sid Grauman

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Edited by
WELFORD BEATON

THE **20 Cents**
FILM SPECTATOR

Published In Hollywood Every Other Saturday

Vol. 4

Hollywood, California, September 3, 1927

No. 1

IN THIS NUMBER

— o —

Second Article on Production
Values by Mary O'Hara

— o —

Story of the Box-Office

— o —

EDWARD LEVEQUE
The Great Hollywood Myth
by Madeleine Matzen

— o —

METROPOLIS

DROP KICK

GENTLEMAN OF PARIS

HEART OF THE YUKON

THIRTEENTH JUROR

HE'S MY DADDY

BUCK PRIVATES

TWELVE MILES OUT

A LETTER TO MR. MAYER

TRINITY 1173

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Mr. Louis B. Mayer,
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President.

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Published by

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WELFORD BEATON, *President and Editor*

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*The only publication conducted solely for those who
THINK about motion pictures.*

HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, SEPT. 3, 1927

LISTEN!

Just what The Spectator must do to make its readers understand its tables of box-office ratings, I don't know. I thought that between us Norman Webb and I had made everything plain, but I have been the recipient of many letters, telegrams and phone calls protesting against The Spectator rating this actor over another, and placing one director before another. A typical protest, contained in a friendly and pleasant letter from Earl Wingart, director of publicity, F. B. O. studios, is as follows "We all think that Bill Le Baron is the greatest producer in the business, and naturally we feel a little bit hurt when someone else is given a higher rating than he." Because it is hot and because I want to return to the back yard where I'm getting the feel of my new fishing rod, very nearly catching a kitten in one cast, I'll agree with any proposition that Wingart advances, and rather than provoke an argument I will confess to double the admiration that he has for Bill. But neither The Spectator, Norman Webb nor I had anything to do with Le Baron's place on the ratings list. Pictures made by other supervisors took in more money at the box-office than pictures made by Le Baron; our ratings are established by box-office returns, and that is all there is to it. This goes for writers, directors, and actors also. The box-office ratings are facts, not opinions, and The Spectator has no control over them.

* * *

In Which We State We're Going to Loaf

SOMEWHERE there's a stream that I want to sit beside with Mrs. Spectator and Virgil, our dog. A road climbs a solitude to reach it, and along its course friendly messages are heliographed by leaves as they fall through filtered sunshine. There is quiet up there, the quiet of wood noises made by old trees as their joints crack, and by young ones as they tremble with youthful joy of being young and supple; the noises of wild things that voice their lack of confidence in man; the songs of birds by day, and at night the question the owl asks above the chorus of the crickets—all the noises that make the great silence that is balm to man when he needs it. I don't know where the place is, but I'm going to head

my car towards it and feel the content of the discoverer's anticipation. Twenty months of writing one thousand words a day, five of those months under the strain of the serious illness of my boy, whose chum I am, has tired me somewhat, and I can not do The Spectator justice when I am tired. So I'm going away to do nothing strenuously, and if I find an old dog beside a road I'll stop my car and get out and sit beside him as I smoke a pipe and scratch him behind the ears. I'll keep heading north until I come to a place where there are endless forests of green trees, and rushing streams with trout in them, and lakes with bass. And if some day I'm fishing and a man comes along and asks me what I think of motion pictures, I'll put down my rod and take him by the throat; and my thumbs will compress his windpipe, and I'll squeeze until the look of fear in his bulging eyes is succeeded by the glaze of unconsciousness, and I'll keep on squeezing until he breathes no more. Then I'll let his limp form sink to the rock, and roll off into the stream, and he'll be carried away while I refill my pipe and resume my fishing. And while I'm away the next Spectator will come to you. I'll have nothing to do with it. Some of its friends will see to it that there is no lack of reading matter. It is to be a contributors' number, which I hope will become a yearly habit. Its pages are open to all those who wish to write for it. They may slam me or one another to their hearts' content. It will be a worth-while number, for several noted writers have signified their intention of writing things that they have been waiting for me to write. I think I'll be back in time to rescue a second Spectator from their clutches, but I can't promise. There may be too many fish to catch and too many people to kill.

TRAGEDY

I met her walking down the street—
A form so trim, a face so sweet—
I cast my heart beneath her feet—
A courteous gesture ever.

She glanced at me with smile demure—
Those limpid eyes, so warm, so pure!
And such the power of their allure
I could do naught but follow.

Ah, sad the day my vagrant heart,
Received that wound from Cupid's dart,
For peace and I must be apart
Forever and forever!

She owns a chauffeur and a car,
A villa in the Place del Mar—
She is a famous movie star—
As wealthy as she's clever.

My meagre wardrobe's almost bare—
I own this suit, an extra pair
Of trousers, much the worse for wear—
Never—ah, no—never!

O, Fate plays many a sorry jest
With hearts that ill can stand the test
Of hope deferred—and all the rest—
Forever and forever!

I long to ride in Phoebe's car;
I can but worship from afar—
Ah, lonesome he who loves a star—
Forever and forever!

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

Hard to Get Them to Believe the Truth

ONE difficulty a writer has is in so treating picture production that people outside Hollywood will believe what he writes. Recently I forwarded to Vanity Fair the first of what was to be a series of six articles on any phase of the screen industry that I cared to deal with. I told merely the truth about the manner in which production is mismanaged, but I managed to scare the legal department of Vanity Fair. I received from its attorney a list of questions and demands that would have taken a month to answer. What proof did I have of my statement that Metro wasted half a million dollars in trying to make a picture out of *Mysterious Island*? was one of the hundred or more questions. The publication simply would not believe the truth, and rather than go to the trouble of satisfying it, I withdrew the article. Among the great newspapers of the world is the Manchester (England) Guardian. It is conservative, safe, sane and sound. It very sensibly concludes that motion pictures themselves bear testimony to the truth of what I write. In a recent issue the Guardian commented as follows under the heading, "Gross Incompetence": "The Film Spectator, an independently minded journal published in Hollywood, California, has just revealed the astonishing fact that last year's dividend on all the capital invested in American moving pictures was just 1.9 per cent. In spite of their enormous markets at home and abroad, in spite of the almost hysterical enthusiasm of the public, in spite of the real talent gathered about the studios of Hollywood and of Long Island, the stockholders in one of the largest American industries are getting less than 2 per cent. for their money. The writer goes on to explain how this happens. He draws a picture, almost unbelievable if we had not seen some of the consequences, of the stupidity, indifference, and gross incompetence which infest the studios. 'None of the big producing organizations,' he says, 'is conducted in a manner that suggests business sanity.' A producer planning a picture has no idea what length his script calls for. Pleading that 'the cheapest thing of the lot is film', he shoots five times as much as he needs and takes out the superfluous four-fifths in the cutting-room. 'It is not just film that lies on the floor; it is a fortune spent on sets, salaries, and lights. . . . Von Stroheim shoots anywhere from twenty to thirty feet for every one that he can use, and we rate him as one of our greatest directors.' Metro-Goldwyn began work on a film called *The Mysterious Island*, spent half a million dollars, and abandoned it because the story was not good enough. They made another picture which was so bad that they shelved it and even sold the producing rights to another company. The men at the head of these great corporations get enormous salaries for this mismanagement. Now they have fallen back on the usual resort of incompetent capitalists—they are demanding wage-cuts, not only in the extravagant salaries of the stars, but in the humbler wages of the average actor. And we see the ludicrous results of the insane policy in every picture-house. One would rest unperturbed by the state of Hollywood if one were not afraid of similar developments in England. British pictures have, as yet, little money to play with; they can not afford costly folly. But they are promised a sheltered market, and there is already a dangerous tendency toward the wild disorganization of Amer-

ica. A gross instance in point came to our knowledge only a few months ago. Needless to say, that kind of thing is not going to produce good pictures, and it is not going to do good business. There is, in fact, much to be said for the view that the artistic emancipation of films is waiting for their economic reformation; you can't put up a good building on a crazy foundation. We trust that British producers will not use the protection of the quota to develop the intellectual drowsy of their American colleagues. If they do, the Film Bill will have been a labor accomplished in vain."

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"Metropolis" Is Notable Picture

ONLY those who view with pessimism the fate of the human race can derive satisfaction from *Metropolis* as a piece of fiction, but those who are pessimistic regarding the development of the screen must become optimists when they view it. It is an extraordinary motion picture, in some ways quite the most extraordinary ever made. One must admire the minds that conceived it and brought it into being. Eric Pommer, the supervisor, and Fritz Lang, the director, are raised to a new dignity in screen art by this production, the former for the magnitude of his conception, the latter for the greatness of his screen interpretation of the conception. It was a brave thing to undertake for it was an adventure into a realm of fiction that it is hazardous to exploit. I have my own ideas regarding the trend of civilization and the state it will have reached when our great-great-grandchildren are adults. You also have your opinion. No doubt it differs from mine. Eric Pommer has his, and it may differ from both yours and mine. He puts his in a picture and asks you and me to accept it. I, for one, will do no such thing. I refuse to believe that a century hence workmen will be slaves who live underground. If Pommer wished to produce a story laid in a mythical country, and showed me bullfrogs driving rabbits tandem, I would not quarrel with him, for it is his own mythical country and I must accept all that his brain peoples it with; but when he says "this is what your descendants will be doing one or two hundred years hence," I refuse to follow him, for definite knowledge on the matter being unobtainable, I do not see why I should dismiss my own opinion and accept his. The whole trend of civilization is in a direction opposite to that which *Metropolis* takes, which makes the picture none the less entertaining, for at least it stimulates discussion. I do not believe that we ever will advance to a time when capital concerns itself with laborers as individuals whose bodily comforts and domestic welfare are of major importance to it from a sociological standpoint; but I do not believe for a moment that it will forget that it can realize upon its investment in labor only in the degree that the laborer is efficient. In *Metropolis* we have laborers reduced to their lowest point of efficiency. The improvement in transportation makes reasonable the prediction that in another century or so men can live hundreds of miles from the scenes of their daily occupations. This will tend to spread the population over great areas and give each man his quota of sunshine and garden. *Metropolis* assumes that civilization will burrow below the surface of the earth and that men will become clammy things with colorless skins and white eyes. It assumes also that men will work long hours, in spite of the fact

that the tendency towards shorter hours is marked. None of the things that Metropolis says time will do to society seem reasonable to me. Capital never will make slaves of workingmen because it is not good business so to do. For all these reasons I could derive no satisfaction from following the story of the picture. But as a picture I found it fascinating. Let us consider it purely as a picture and not as a piece of literature.

* * *

Production Weak in Human Qualities

METROPOLIS was made to be released in twelve reels. Such was the footage in which the whole story was told. All the intimate phases of the story, the development of the love of the boy for the girl, the views of the home life, and the social existence of the characters, were sacrificed to production when five reels were eliminated from the original film to bring it down to the standard seven-reel feature length. I believe the American version would have been a much better picture if the human element had not been reduced so greatly. When Channing Pollock revised the film to make it fit our conditions—a job that brought him twenty thousand dollars and his name in gigantic letters on the screen—no doubt he was persuaded by Paramount's salesmen that production value was what the public craved, consequently he eliminated everything that would have given the story any plausibility. Lang's direction reveals more aptitude for movement than for acting. All his mass shots and those in which the machinery was featured were handled in a manner that shows that Lang is a master in the treatment of such subjects, but when he directed his actors he was not so much at home. The father gives a convincing performance, in a quiet, repressed way that made the portrayal a powerful one. The son overacts all the way through, and gives a performance that entirely lacks conviction. Apparently the director allowed his actors to give their individual conceptions of the characters, without regard for their relation one to another. Metropolis is rather an argument for dual direction. If Lang's efforts with the material aspects of the production had been supplemented with a Lubitsch's skill at making the characters human we would have had a better picture, although the story militates against it being a perfect one. When Ufa made Metropolis it did not arbitrarily place its time one thousand years hence. As I understand it, Eric Pommer's idea was to depict life one or two centuries hence. Paramount's press agents, with their usual flair for exaggeration, made it ten centuries, thereby preparing the public for something more weird than it received. Technically the picture is a revelation of what can be done with models and a camera. The scenes of city life, airplanes passing among buildings, taxicabs dashing along elevated streets, pedestrians moving along sidewalks, were done so realistically that they must astonish anyone who is not familiar with the manner in which such things are done. It will interest Hollywood to know that these scenes were shot as we shoot our cartoon comedies: cardboard cut-outs being advanced after each shot. It cost less to shoot the scenes by this method than it would have to have used moving models, even though it took no less than nine months to complete them. The most striking shots in the picture were those showing the illuminated rings passing up and down around the dummy to which the face and

form of the girl were being transferred. I have no idea how it was done. Another effective shot was that showing several columns of people converging on the tower of Babel. It gives the impression that many thousands of people were used. If you looked closely, however, you could detect evidences of it being a divided shot, or whatever it is called—the same bunch of people being shot half a dozen times. No matter what degree of entertainment you derive from Metropolis you must give it credit for being a great intellectual feat as well as an example of the extraordinary possibilities of the screen. It is to be hoped that some day Eric Pommer will find himself so situated in Hollywood that he can attempt something else equally daring and ambitious.

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Adolphe Menjou as "Gentleman of Paris"

ADOLPHE MENJOU seems to have found his director. He has made another picture under the direction of H. D'Abbadie D'Arrast, who directed *Service for Ladies*. This time it is *A Gentleman of Paris*, and it is the best thing that has come from the Paramount studios since *Beau Geste*, although no two pictures could be farther apart in theme, locale and treatment. Menjou gives what I think will be regarded as the best performance of his career. He is again the sophisticated rounder of *A Woman of Paris*, and is given greater heights to achieve than the Chaplin picture afforded him. He has many moods in his new picture, all variations of one mood—his playfully cynical outlook on life—but none the less well defined on that account. Menjou is essentially an actor who responds to intelligent direction, and in D'Arrast's hands he had it. Although it is only his second picture, D'Arrast directs with the sureness of a veteran. He makes a Parisian drawing-room convincing, and we have precious few directors who can do that. The high point of the picture is reached when Adolphe apparently is detected cheating at cards at a party given in the home of his prospective father-in-law. In surroundings of the sort there is as much drama in such a denouement as there is in a murder, and D'Arrast builds the drama admirably. The guests are cast splendidly, a convincing bit being the presence of two boys, apparently young brothers of Adolphe's fiancée, who say their good nights and leave the drawing-room a couple of minutes after they enter it from the dining-room. The presence of the boys establishes the gathering as a family party. When the stakes for which Menjou and William Davidson are playing become high enough to excite the guests, the excitement is registered in a manner that indicates masterly direction. It is well bred and placid, but through it all there is an evidence of tenseness that I never before saw achieved on the screen with such good taste. Good taste, in fact, is the chief feature of D'Arrast's direction. When the game becomes exciting the guests cluster around the table until the two players are hidden completely. D'Arrast does not cleave a lane through them in order that the camera can pick up the leading characters. He moves to a close-up to reveal them, having one side of his group as the background for the shot, which is precisely the way in which such a scene should be presented. When Menjou is branded as a cheat the editing is faulty. It is the only part of the picture with which I quarrel. The sympathy is with Menjou, as the audience is confident that he is innocent, consequently there is drama

in the action of the guests in spurning him. This action is presented entirely in close-ups, exactly the wrong way to present it. It is the mass treatment of Menjou, not the individual treatment, that makes him a pathetic figure; it is the action of a woman turning her back on him, not her facial expression when doing it, that lends strength to the scene. Menjou's reaction is shown in close-ups also. They are entirely unnecessary, for we know him by that time, and are aware what mental suffering must be his, and it would be much stronger to have left to our imaginations the working of his mind. The scene in its entirety should be presented in a long shot showing the guests ignoring him; and the failure to pick him out in close-ups would have added a further note of pathos to it by bringing out the idea that even the camera had deserted him. The actions of the guests showed that they considered that he had no place in such a gathering, and the camera should have been used to heighten such an impression. It is a fine point, perhaps, but the cinematic art has advanced roughshod as far as it can, and in its future strides it must pay more attention to its footgear than it has been doing. It is a pity that such a splendid picture as this one must resort to the close-up evil in a place where it can do so much harm.

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Fine Performances and Fine Direction

A GENTLEMAN of Paris is Paramount's success with a story out of which Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer made such a woeful failure. Metro produced it as *A Certain Young Man*, basing it on Bellamy the Magnificent, but made such a bad picture out of it that it was not released. Paramount bought it for seventy-five thousand dollars, the value it attached to one situation, that of the master being detected in having an affair with his valet's wife. *A Gentleman of Paris* will be so successful that it will look as if the price were not exorbitant, but it will be the fine acting and the fine direction that will make it a success, not the strength of the situation that cost so much money. I'll confess that I went with some trepidation to view the picture, for I had a feeling that it was juggling with my reputation. I had seen Nicholas Soussanin do small parts in two pictures, and although that was the sole extent of my acquaintance with him, I recorded in *The Spectator* my opinion that he was a sterling actor. I received later a letter from D'Arrast stating that on the strength of my estimate of Soussanin he was to have a big part in the Menjou picture. I am quite grateful to the actor. Next to Menjou's acting and the direction, his performance is the big feature of the production. He is one of the little group of splendid artists who have come to us from Russia. This picture should bring him well to the front. In *A Gentleman of Paris* we have Lawrence Grant, the king in *Service for Ladies*. Here is another sterling actor, a finished artist who can add strength to the strongest cast. Bill Davidson comes to the bat in this picture as a sophisticated man of the world who can wear good clothes and conduct himself as if they were made for him. He is easy and natural, and adds considerably to the wealth of good acting that characterizes the production. Shirley O'Hara is the sweetheart. She is new to me, but I will watch her hereafter, as I believe she has something that will get her somewhere. Her presence in the picture was another exhibition of wise casting. She is a sweet,

unsophisticated youngster, in strong contrast to the sophisticated types with which Menjou had his affairs. The obvious innocence of Shirley gives point to Menjou's anxiety that she should be kept in ignorance of his gay ways. Ivy Harris and Arlette Marchal have small parts and enact them capably. The titles are well written and except for three or four lapses, are examples of how perfect punctuation should be presented on the screen. The person who punctuated them should perform a like service for all Paramount titles, and if he has any spare time Paramount might lend him to Universal. The story of *A Gentleman of Paris* is not noted for its progression from one exciting situation to another. It takes two or three days out of the life of a gay blade and shows us what happens to him. The love story is ready-made, the opening shot being an insert of a telegram which tells us that Adolphe already is engaged. The story leaves him in the same condition, and we are spared a wedding. Nor is there any love-making. It opens with about the most delicious comedy touch that I ever saw on the screen, but I won't tell you what it is. Paramount has made so many pictures lately so poor in quality that they will not be played in the big downtown houses. Undoubtedly *A Gentleman of Paris* will take the place of one of the flops and it should not be long before you can see this bit of comedy for yourself. You can put down this picture as one you must see.

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Bushman Scores in "The Thirteenth Juror"

A REALLY powerful performance by Francis X. Bushman is the outstanding feature of *The Thirteenth Juror*, a screen version of Counsel for the Defense, Henry Irving Dodge's well known play. It is a Universal picture, directed by Edward Laemmle. Charles A. Logue made the adaptation, wrote the continuity, and supervised the story during production. Logue retained in his screen version all the big dramatic punches of the play, weaving them together in a businesslike way that makes the story of the picture an engrossing one. Edward Laemmle can direct, even if he does happen to be Uncle Carl's nephew. He has a fine sense of drama, and a sincerity which he imparts to his cast with the result that his pictures never suffer from a poor quality of acting. He does things with which I do not agree, but he does them deliberately and for a reason that satisfies him of their wisdom. In this picture he brings Bushman, a successful lawyer; Lloyd Whitlock, the district attorney, and Fred Kelsey, a detective, together in Bushman's library. During the entire scene the men wear their hats. No doubt the theory back of it is that owing to the tensivity of the scene the men would forget to remove their hats. Men do not either remember or forget to uncover when they should. They do it instinctively. This whole library sequence is the weakest part of the picture technically, and it should have been one of the biggest moments. It is shown in close-ups which take all the life out of it. There is no drama in a man's head occupying the screen alone while he is talking dramatically to a group of people. Such editing as we have in this sequence defies all the rules of picture sense. We can blame the director for robbing the scenes of some of their reality by having the characters retain their hats, but the major fault belongs to whoever is responsible for the editing. But the thing that matters most is that *The Thirteenth Juror*

is a very good picture, even though there is nothing whatever in it about a thirteenth juror. As I have said, the outstanding feature is Frank Bushman's performance. He emphasizes again the fact that he is one of the most capable actors we have. I could not imagine anyone else carrying his part in this picture with the force, tenderness, impressiveness, and dignity that he displays. He is at all times superb. He is a magnificent specimen of manhood to gaze upon, but not in one foot of film does he give the slightest indication that he is aware of the fact. I am confident that in a series of stories that would give him a chance Bushman could be made one of the greatest box-office bets in the business. Another splendid artist who appears in this picture is Anna Q. Nilsson. Her part is rather negative, as the story revolves around her more than it involves her, but it is an essential part and she handles it with that degree of artistry that characterizes all her screen appearances. Walter Pidgeon also contributes an intelligent and convincing performance, and Whitlock is a thoroughly satisfactory district attorney. Laemmle directed the courtroom scenes splendidly. A trial is a hard thing for a director to reproduce convincingly within the limits of the screen, but Laemmle proved equal to the task. *The Thirteenth Juror* is thoroughly satisfactory screen entertainment. It is a picture good enough to be shown in any house anywhere. The lighting, composition of the scenes, and photography are remarkably effective. Paul Perez supplied a set of titles that maintain the high standard of the production.

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"Buck Privates" Is an Entertaining Comedy

MELVILLE Brown has given us a new Lya de Putti in his *Buck Privates* which he recently directed for Universal. She becomes a demure young German lass who falls in love with an American soldier, and plays all phases of the characterization quite delightfully. I am convinced that Miss de Putti can act and that her talent is for comedy, even though we met her first in a dramatic role in *Variety*. I understand she gave a very good performance in a picture which I have not seen, one directed by James Young, who by now should be making the best pictures of his career, but who, for some unexplained reason, is not presented with many opportunities to do so. In the Brown picture she is cast intelligently and directed intelligently, and so gives a good account of herself. In this picture we have Zasu Pitts also. She contributes a little gem of a performance in an eccentric comedy role. She has no equal on the screen in such a part, just as she has no equal in any other part that suits her, whether it be comedy or tragedy. *Buck Privates* is a war comedy differing from others of its kind in that it treats both the war and the soldiers with dignity. The drama of trench warfare is brought out strongly in the opening sequence, the placing of the cameras on the floor of the trench heightening the impression that the action takes place below the surface of the earth. In this sequence comedy and drama are mixed adroitly. The three comedy characters, Eddie Gribbon, Les Bates, and Buddy Post, and the leading man, Malcolm McGregor, are introduced in tense scenes which are relieved by the first suggestions that, after all, the picture is to be a comedy. And thereafter it is a comedy rich in humor. McGregor gives a good performance, and under Brown's direction achieves a de-

gree of naturalness that not always distinguishes his screen appearances. Gribbon, of course, is good, and both Bates and Post keep up their ends capably. This part should provide Bates with more important roles than he has been playing. He is an excellent comedian. Brown wrote his own adaptation and working script, being one of the few directors who can do such jobs adequately. He is young in the writing and directing end of pictures, and should go a long way. He still has some of the conventional movie habits. In showing a group of people watching Bates and Post drinking beer he cuts a lane through the onlookers in order that the camera can reach the principal characters. If he had shot the scene from the other side of the bar he would have brought Post and Bates into the foreground and could have grouped the onlookers naturally. A shot of James Marcus, who gives an excellent performance, shows his face smeared with glycerine, despite the fact that a handkerchief is displayed prominently in his upper pocket. No one with a handkerchief ever allows tears to wet his face. I never have seen a glycerine shot that was convincing. The one of Marcus is disgusting. If he had applied the handkerchief to his eyes it would have created the impression of weeping even if he had not been able to pump up any tears. The titles in *Buck Privates* were written excellently, but they are punctuated with that delightful disregard for accuracy that is characteristic of Universal pictures. The entertainment quality of the Laemmle output is improving steadily, but I can not say as much for the quality of the punctuation. It is never anything but terrible.

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What Supervision Cost "Fire Brigade"

VARIOUS reasons have been advanced to explain the failure of *The Fire Brigade* at the box office. The generally accepted explanation is that its title militated against its success. Titles have some effect on the box office, but I do not believe they can make failures out of good pictures, or make successes out of poor pictures. It is word-of-mouth advertising that is the determining factor in deciding the fate of a picture, and such advertising is not affected by a title. The most a title can do is to lessen the early attendance. If the picture be an outstanding one it can live down the poorest title that can be tacked on it. The other night I viewed *The Fire Brigade* for a second time in an effort to see if I could determine what is the matter with it. I decided that it lacks what makes *Seventh Heaven* great: a soul. It tries to embrace too much territory. There is grandfather love in it, also mother love, brother love, and the love of a boy and girl for one another. It is too much. When I watched the superb performance of Charlie Ray, unquestionably one of the two or three best actors on the screen; and the exquisite art of that beautiful creature, May McAvoy, I regretted that Metro had not made a great love story out of the picture, and centered on the young people to make it appealing. But the circumstances under which the picture was made are responsible for its failure. Screen art is subtle. When I first reviewed *Seventh Heaven* I said, in effect, that such a picture could have been the product only of perfect harmony on the set. *The Fire Brigade* could have been as great if it had been made as greatly. But it was supervised to death. Throughout the entire time of its making Hunt Stromberg nagged at Bill Nigh-

until he nearly drove the director crazy. Once Nigh threatened to kill Stromberg if he did not get off the set, and in a more humane moment threatened to deliver just one blow that would squash Hunt's nose all over his face. Imagine trying to turn out a good picture under such circumstances. If Bill Nigh had been left alone I am confident that *The Fire Brigade* would have been a box office triumph. Stromberg's method of supervision probably cost Metro the greater part of a million dollars. Nigh was signed for ten weeks in which to make the picture. When he arrived on the lot the story was in such a mess that his first six weeks were devoted to endeavoring to inject some sense in it. The shooting was just nicely under way when his contract expired. For a couple of days the cast remained idle, but the overhead remained active, while the terms of Nigh's continuing contract were discussed. When shooting was resumed the director was subjected to such annoying supervision that it was impossible for him to do his best work. He would be in the middle of a carefully rehearsed scene, and director and actors would be concentrating on it, when Stromberg would visit the set and want to know why the scene was being shot that way, what was the matter with the lights, and who the fellow over there was. Nigh was forced to shoot scenes that he knew were awful, but which were ordered by the supervisor. He shot that great scene between Ray and Holmes Herbert in the way that reached the screen, but Stromberg said it was wrong. It took two days to make the set-up again and reshoot the sequence in accordance with Stromberg's conception of it. It never got beyond the projection-room, but it cost two days overhead. Nigh was twenty-two weeks on the job. If the script had been ready for him when he arrived on the lot, and if Stromberg had let him alone, he could have shot the picture in eight or nine weeks. The thing that is the matter with *The Fire Brigade* is supervision.

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"The Drop Kick" Is Rather Good

DICK Barthelmess is coming back. For a couple of years he appeared in pictures that were far from good, and his performances in them indicated that he knew how poor they were and didn't care. *The Patent Leather Kid* is doing big business in the East, and *The Drop Kick*, not yet released, is going to please his present friends and make him a lot of new ones. It is not by any means a flawless picture, but it is a good one, the best that has come out of Burbank for a long time. There must be some people attached to Dick's unit who are not used generally in First National productions, for *The Drop Kick* possesses virtues that have been missing from most of the recent films that have come from this studio. It is a college story with a definite plot, has good atmosphere, an adequate production, quite good performances, and the most rottenly punctuated titles I have seen this season. Barthelmess can act. For years he has been one of my favorites, and in this picture he becomes again the young fellow whom I have liked. His performance rings true. Playing opposite him is Barbara Kent. A couple of months ago I said in *The Spectator* that this young woman has something, and after seeing her in *The Drop Kick* I am more than ever convinced of it. It is not what she does in the picture, but what her performance indicates she

might do that gives me confidence in her future. She has a most appealing screen personality. Dorothy Revier plays a heavy, and although her characterization is so overdone that it becomes ridiculous, she shows that with proper direction she should be capable of doing really good work. It was my first glimpse of her, and I look for her to do something worth while. Hedda Hopper, always the sterling artist, is well cast and gives a performance of distinction. Eugene Strong, another member of the cast whom I saw for the first time, is splendid as the football coach. He's a good actor. A peculiarity of the story is that the inevitable football game which the hero wins in the last minute, has nothing hinging on the outcome. It is not part of the story, but is a darned good game, well directed and full of thrills. Stock shots are cut into it quite adroitly. Always when I see such shots on the screen I wonder how they impress people who do not understand how pictures are made. I hope they give Dick credit for employing eighty thousand extras. They could get quite a kick out of it. The only fault I have to find with the direction of John Francis Dillon is his habit of grouping his characters so that they face the camera. When Strong commits suicide students rush to his body and cluster on the side of it farthest from the camera. The natural grouping would have been to show them completely surrounding the body. In one sequence in Dorothy Revier's bedroom the window blinds are not drawn, although she is dressed scantily and the room is lighted brilliantly. It is registered that her house is on one of the principal streets of the college town, and if it was her nightly habit to keep her blinds up the front of the house no doubt would have been a favorite gathering place for the students. Inserts of one sheet of a letter showed it to have four lines of writing on it. A medium shot of what was supposed to be the same insert showed eight or nine lines of writing. Such things, although small in themselves, show carelessness in the technical end of the production. One shot shows Barbara's face most unbecomingly smeared with glycerine although she has a handkerchief in her hand. First National should not confine its economy urge to glycerine. But I congratulate the organization upon its success in demonstrating that it can make a good picture occasionally. I had begun to despair.

* * *

Anne Cornwall Fine in "Heart of the Yukon"

A CORRESPONDENT says this about me: "Much to my regret, I have arrived at the conclusion that you have in your sanctum only pens that carp and criticize: that the kindly ink of commendation is arid in your well." A base calumny! My indignation is aroused and I welcome an opportunity to refute this distressing charge. To-wit: Recently I had occasion to drop in at the Hillstreet theatre where a variety bill was supplemented by one of the customary "filler" pictures; in this case a Tacoma, Washington, production announced as *Heart of the Yukon*. In the summer-warm theatre the snowy slopes of Mount Rainier were pleasing to behold. The hero, John Bowers, was consistently and super-actively heroic; the villain, Russell Simpson, was malignantly unswerving in the abysmal depth of his iniquity; the sympathetic Old Party, Frank Campeau, never for an instant was allowed to relax his insistence upon my compassion.

It was all most restful, because in no case was I called upon to flagellate my mind to appreciate subtleties: for there were none. You see? So far, no word but praise. Now I am about to cap even this encomium. The girl—a buffeted child of fortune—was played by Anne Cornwall, who in recent months seems to have deserted dramatic roles of lovely heroines in distress for the more vivacious scintillation of comedy, twinkling as Al Christie's one and only girl star. I have known Anne for some time as an exceedingly pretty girl, small, smart, and glimmering with mischief. Seeing her name on the main title I anticipated seeing again the Anne I know. And when she flashed into view I received a surprise: for of all wistful, bedraggled, hopelessly and pathetically ugly little brats I ever have seen she took the cake! And what a performance she gave! Despite the pictorial calamities which pursued her, the frightful cinematographic perils which beset her, Anne managed to surmount the handicap of story triteness and brought to her work a personality and an art that shone through the deliberately hideous makeup required by the part. Hers was a real performance, one of which any artist might justly be proud. Of course the Ugly Duckling became the glowing beauty. It was inevitable; just as inevitable as the happy ending in which virtue and the hero triumphed, and in which iniquity received its merited and deadly punishment. It was that kind of a picture. Heart of the Yukon is Anne Cornwall's private property all the way. She wrapped the story up and put it in her pocket. Some day that young woman is going to be given a crack at a really big role. And when she gets it, the acclaim which will follow after will prompt me to say, with pardonable complaisance, "I told you so."

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And a Little Child Shall Show Them

REG Denny has done something pretty big for a star. He has written a story that deliberately gives the picture made from it to someone else. It is a sensible thing to do, for a star's box-office value is fixed by the quality of the pictures he appears in and not solely by his contributions to them. Everyone who was a big box-office attraction yesterday and is not to-day lost his drawing power through poor stories and not because he can not act as well as he used to. Of course this goes for both sexes. The most valuable reputation a star can have is one for always appearing in a good picture. You can take a person with but slight knowledge of acting, surround him always with good actors, provide him with good stories, and give him good direction, and he can become the biggest money maker in the business. Tom Meighan was made that way, but his success gave him the idea that he could act and that he was a judge of stories. This was the beginning of his end. John Barrymore and Adolphe Menjou are two stars who will last a long time, for each insists upon getting the best story possible and wants only the most talented artists surrounding him. Each of them has told me more than once that if anyone can steal his picture from him so much the better for the picture, and I believe both of them are sincere. Not more than five per cent. of our stars hold this sensible view. The average woman star believes that the public is interested more in which side of her face is photographed than it is in the entertainment quality of

her pictures. Close-ups, which detract so much from nearly all pictures, are insisted upon by nine out of ten stars, none of whom has sense enough to know that the public is getting fed up on gigantic features of players. The evil that stars do to pictures is, of course, blamable on the incapacity of producers, who know nothing of pictures themselves and give the stars too much leeway in deciding what must go into them. If we are to judge by Denny's latest, *He's My Daddy*, an atrocious name for such a sincere picture, he is one of the few sensible stars. True, he did not give the part that steals the picture to anyone who will challenge his supremacy, for the person who enacted the part happens to be a four-year-old girl who is going to be somewhat of a sensation when the picture is released. The young lady's name is Mary Jane La Verne, and in the picture she is called "Pudge", which I think is a splendid name, and it is the one by which I hereafter shall refer to her. Pudge is pretty, with that prettiness which suggests intelligence. She seems to be totally unconscious of the existence of a camera, and judging by what I saw of her on the screen, it must have been a joy to direct her. In the picture she reflects many moods, for it is a big part, and she is absolutely perfect in each of them. When she cries you can see her lips quivering and her throat contracting, corroborative testimony to the genuineness of the tears that pour from her eyes; and when she laughs, she laughs all over with a mirth that is contagious. There is a hint of drama in some of her scenes and she handles it as convincingly as all the other phases. She must have understood her part, for there is not the slightest sign of an effort to portray an emotion that she did not comprehend. When *He's My Daddy* is

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released our established actors and actresses should view it and try to discover what it is that this four-year-old child has and they lack.

* * *

Story Strong in Human Interest

HES My Daddy—I shudder every time I write it—is going to be a success because it is compounded of the ingredients that make for success: it makes us laugh and cry. It is Pudge's story from the first. She is an abused, ragged youngster, who dreams of an ideal daddy, and she will gain the instant sympathy of any audience. Through a succession of laughable incidents she accumulates Reg as her daddy, and he lives up to her fondest dreams. The story is not told sentimentally, and there is nothing mawkish about it, comedy predominating all the way through, yet it has a strong sentimental appeal and will send you out of the theatre feeling just a little more confident that all's well with the world. It is inconceivable to me why producers consistently ignore the heart in selecting stories. If you have heart interest in a production you can take liberties with everything else in it and still have an acceptable picture. Heart interest is a known quantity, the one thing that always pleases the majority. Pudge goes straight to your heart when she first appears in—in—I can't write it again—and thereafter your sole interest in the picture is what happens to her. And because he has a story with a definite thought in it, and because that thought is a big one, Denny appears to better advantage than he has in any other picture he has made. His characterization is based on something tangible, and he acts almost as well as Pudge. He does not resort to grimaces and horseplay to put over his points. In no scene is his acting at all overdone. Barbara Kent, whom I refer to somewhere else in this issue, plays opposite Reg, and again her sweetness and sincerity register. She has a suggestion of the same quality of wistfulness that makes Janet Gaynor so outstanding. She will not be the actress that Janet is already, but she is quite young, and under Henry Hennigson's wise guidance will amount to something. Tom O'Brien is a traffic cop in this picture and plays the part splendidly. Lilian Rich has a role that gives very little more than her beauty a chance to register. Fred Newmeyer directed. He deserves great credit for the sincerity that the picture reveals. He handles all his larger scenes in a capable manner, but commits many minor faults which interfere with the smoothness of the production. Some of these faults were in the script and the editing, and all of them could have been avoided easily. When the step-mother of Pudge appears, Denny asks her to surrender the child to him, and instead of sending her to his attorney he gives her a check forthwith and gets nothing in writing from her. Everyone in any audience who has even the haziest notion of the existence of adoption laws will note the weakness in the scene. And Denny stands up as he writes the check, notwithstanding the fact that there are several tables in the room. It is unreal and unconvincing. In one shot Armand Kaliz walks the length of a couch. In a subsequent cut to the same scene he makes the same walk again. Denny stands in front of a glass door and goes through a lot of contortions to keep those in the room from seeing Pudge who is outside the door. He could have accomplished his purpose merely by pulling together the

curtains that were hanging on the door. If it was thought that the contortions were necessary to provoke a laugh, as they did, why were the curtains on the door? When Pudge gets a collection of clothes the boxes containing them are piled in the drawing-room. Despite the fact that the house is full of servants the boxes are allowed to remain there, instead of being taken to her room. The love story between Denny and Barbara is not developed at all. It merely is. The titles are clever. There are some of the wittiest that I have seen in any picture, but they are punctuated in accordance with the ignorance system which is so much in vogue out at Universal City.

* * *

Something We've Touched on Before

WHILE the postman continues on his rounds there can not be a complete shortage of ideas for Spectator paragraphs. "In pointing out faults you are always specific except in the cases of criticism of screen punctuation," comes a message in a feminine hand. "I do not see how you expect us to profit from such criticism unless you show us just what you mean." Very well. Take some titles in a late Universal picture, *Buck Privates*, directed by Melville Brown, and a very entertaining picture. The titles are well written, but I imagine that there are more than one hundred mistakes in them that anyone with a grammar school education should be able to correct. "Supposing we sit down—there's a million things I want to say to you," is one title, spoken by a character who is presented as an educated person, therefore no liberties can be taken with his speech without taking him out of character. This title is wrong in wording, grammar and punctuation. This is the way it should have been presented: "Suppose we sit down. There are a million things I want to say to you." Another example: "Poor Cupid—that one must have had his number on it." Correct: "Poor Cupid! That one, etc." Again: "Lay off—this is my glory." Correct: "Lay off! This is, etc." To conclude: "What is your name and rank?" Correct: "What are your name and rank?" They will tell you on the Universal lot that if the punctuation which I give were used on the screen it would give audiences optical heebie-jeebies. That is the alibi advanced by all the other studios. The truth is that they do not know how to punctuate and they present this excuse to cloak their ignorance. But there is one feature of the titles in *Buck Privates* that deserves commendation. It is a war comedy and there are both Americans and Germans in it. When a title is spoken by a German it is put on the screen in type that approximates German script; when one is spoken by an American it is printed in our ordinary block letters. It's quite an idea as it assists in identifying the speaker as well as showing that one of the styles of type indicates a translation into English. It is a much better device than the usual one of dissolving from a foreign language into English. I believe it is Mel Brown's idea, but I don't suppose he would raise a fuss if others used it.

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Jack Gilbert Not Much as a Critic

WILL Jack Gilbert please go back to his make-up box and the Kleig lights and leave criticizing to those of us who have adopted it as a habit? Almost simultaneously with the release of *Twelve Miles Out* he informed the world through the medium of the Associated Press that it was a punk picture and that he had a violent inward craving to do something more worthy of his artistic attainments. I presumed that a picture whose star denied it virtues must have none, consequently I steered shy of this one that offended Jack, for, to make a confession, I have grown tired of finding fault with the product of the Metro lot and did not wish deliberately to pick out another picture that would lead me to do it again. But I became part of a dinner party that wound up at *Twelve Miles Out*—and I think that Jack is a bum critic. It is not by any means a great picture, but it is a highly entertaining one. There was not a foot of it that did not interest me. It is darned good motion picture stuff all the way through, and Jack Conway has given it excellent and intelligent direction. It wooed me into such a complacent mood that I forgave it even its too generous use of close-ups. In fact, the gravest charge I can bring against it is the way Joan Crawford wore her hair. I am beginning to notice hairdressing. I don't know what's come over me. Joan seemed to have given considerable thought to how she was to treat her bob, and to have arrived at the decision to adopt the style that would make her look as unattractive as possible. Her eyes are rather prominent, and to offset them she should be a bit fluffy about the temples, but she chose in this picture to draw her hair back severely from her forehead, thus making her eyes more prominent than ever. I hope she never will do it again, for she has considerable ability as an actress, and should not do things to distract our attention from her art. Reverting to more masculine meditations: I liked Gilbert's performance better than any he has given since *The Big Parade*. It was refreshing to see him as a regular tough guy, something that gave him an opportunity to do a definite characterization. The only fault that I can find with him is that the expression of his eyes is the same in all the moods he portrays, a failing he always has. In the mechanics of his acting he is perfect, and I do not agree with him that he was miscast. Ernest Torrence gives quite a wonderful performance, although I think that at times he indulges in too many facial contortions. His best moments are when he becomes serious and keeps his face straight. He is delightful, though, in his comedy touches, and his acting was the feature that I enjoyed most in the picture. When the end came I prepared to mutter to my neighbor a protest against the folly of letting Gilbert live—and he died. It is a superb ending, and the only logical one, but I thought that the obsession for happy endings would rule again. However, if the ending did not run true to movie traditions, the manner in which it comes about does. Gilbert dies with his eyes shut, which is faulty direction. To hark back to Joan: she has one love scene with Gilbert in which she is particularly effective, and which gives evidence of her growing power as an actress. But I do not agree with her characterization. She is too highbrow to fall in love with such a tough customer as Gilbert was supposed to be. All my

No Wonder the Horses Laugh

IF THERE is any truth in the adage that, "A fool and his money are easily parted," then this must be a nation of lunatics, and when you think that ninety per cent of the adult American population are betting "Billions" (not mere millions!), but Billions—Get it, Billions, of good American Dollars that they can and will live for ten or twenty years whether God likes it or not, can you doubt it?

Such a thing is either a blasphemy or lunacy. Don't laugh. "You are one of them," *You*, whoever you are, who reads this, *You* and the other eight-nine per cent of the Intelligent (?) American adults; betting Life Insurance Companies "Billions" that you can beat *Death* and beat God (if you don't believe in one you sure will in the other sooner or later), and you have been doing this thing year after year, for over fifty years now.

Poor and ever beloved Abraham Lincoln would never have said, "You can't fool all the people all the time," if he had studied Life Insurance.

When one thinks of it he must admit that we are a lot of Financial Morons.

You would laugh at "The poor Fish" who would bet ten dollars that Dempsey would win the championship, and another ten that he would not, and yet before the grin has left your face, *you* walk up to the insurance betting ring, and lay down a thousand that you will die this year, and another thousand that you won't. Ha! Ha! No wonder the horses laugh.

That's Life Insurance, as it is bought to-day by ninety per cent of the Intelligent (?) Americans.

For six weeks we have been trying to teach you this, and that we can get you back 25% or more of what you have spent on your insurance; that we can save it from inheritance tax; and that, "THAT WAS NOT ALL", but telling the American public something that is for their own good usually invites suspicion.

Tell an American he is foolish, and you are RADICAL.

Prove to him that he is a fool, and you are an ANARCHIST.

Try and stop him from being a fool, and you are a BOLSHEVIST.

Prove that Life Insurance as an Investment is bunk, and you are a TWISTER.

To buy Life Insurance properly, you must take the investment part out of the insurance, which is in reality, "Taking the lie out of life insurance", THAT IS TWISTING.

N. B.

I have no insurance to sell. It costs nothing to find out the truth of what I say, and I will be glad to answer in the future as I have done in the past, any inquiries addressed c/o The Film Spectator.

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objections to *Twelve Miles Out* are petty ones. I think it is quite delightful to have a picture about bootlegging and high-jacking. High-jacking is a splendid way to get liquor; one gets it by the thousand cases, and has some exquisite sport thrown in for good measure. Bootleggers play such an intimate part in the lives of all of us that we have a personal interest in the worries that beset them. The picture is a red-blooded one, and it is clean, amusing and thrilling. I congratulate Metro, and also Jack Conway.

* * *

Cog-Wheels Play the Leading Parts

A MOTION picture in which the characters are played by tin pans, steam whistles, cog-wheels, and pile-drivers is somewhat of a novelty. I saw such a one the other day, *Ballet Mecanique*. It was produced by Dudley Murphy, a motion picture composer. I call him a picture "composer" because he seems to me to have a feeling for this medium analogous to the composer's feeling for music. With a wide range of technical and camera experience at his command, he develops his stories from the original theme or idea with a vivid imagination for business and characterization, plus that new dimension which makes pictures interesting—rhythm. The composer is always conscious of his tempo and rhythm, and so is Murphy. In his film, *Ballet Mecanique*, I saw a motion picture conceived as a separate and distinct art—a "pure movie" whose drama is the thrill of dynamics. It has a rhythm that develops a suspense and holds its audience without a plot, and stirs them on to an emotional pitch by a deft handling of its tempo. In his continuity of *The Skyscraper* I saw how he composes his action so that his tempo builds with his plot and characterization. To an already dramatic story he has added that third dimension, usually left to the director and cutter, tempo—so that in reading some of this continuity I got a tremendous sense of the rhythm of construction. Such an ability is tremendously valuable to a producer for it is this tempo that often makes or breaks a picture, and if one can visualize it to stimulate the director's mind, in addition to the situation and business, what a valuable continuity it is. As an example of his work I remember in Gloria Swanson's last picture, *Love of Sunya*, what a refreshing note Murphy gave to the picture by his handling of the crystal sequences. They had personality because of their tempo. Murphy wrote, directed and photographed these short episodes of the picture and the critics and public welcomed his contribution. It seems to me that motion picture "composer" is a better term than "writer", for this medium is closer to music than to writing. But to apply it to the average writer would be false, for few of them really know the camera and have feeling for the rhythm and timing of pictures. Murphy should go far in the directorial field of pictures.

* * *

One of the most ridiculous things we do to pictures is to inject "comedy relief" in them, scenes which have no relation to the context of the story and which are inserted in the extraordinary belief that you must provide the morons in the audience with a few things to laugh at. There are two such scenes in *The Devil's Paradise*, an otherwise well sustained drama directed by Michael Curtiz for Warner Brothers. One of them is simply silly and

the other is disgusting. The rest of the picture is dramatic and beautiful. The presumption must be that the morons do not like drama and beauty and must be given nonsense and vulgarity. Both these objectionable shots combined are on the screen about one minute. The whole picture runs about seventy-five minutes. Will Jack Warner tell me how he can make morons like a picture by giving them one minute of something that pleases them and seventy-four minutes of something that bores them? The whole theory upon which this kind of "comedy relief" is inserted is wrong, and it reveals that the studio responsible for it lacks the ability to think in terms of the business it is in.

* * *

When the confessions were in order at the Biltmore conferences would have been an appropriate time for Louis B. Mayer to explain why he brought Natalie Kovanko to this country. She co-starred with Moskvine in *Michael Strogoff* and was considered one of the best screen actresses in France. Metro signed her to a five-year contract with the six months optional clause. For six months she did nothing, not doing one day's work during the entire time, but she drew her salary. Metro did not exercise the option, turning her loose without having given her an opportunity of becoming known in Hollywood studios. Apart altogether from the business aspect of it, it was a disgraceful way to treat an artist. If the actors had not allowed the eloquence of Conrad Nagel and Milton Sills to make fools of them they would have joined Equity and made of it a body strong enough to force the producers

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to grant an equitable contract which would make the optional clause a mutual agreement whereby the artist could insist upon the contract running for its full term if he so desired.

* * *

Norman Webb and I are going to have a lot of fun. In the first part of The Spectator I am going to continue to give my opinion of pictures and in the back part he is going to check up on me by showing just how the pictures attract the public. We look at films from directly opposite angles. To him a picture that makes a lot of money must be good. I am not interested in how much money they make. I know a lot of pictures with which I found fault have been financial successes, and in not a few cases while condemning them I acknowledged that they would roll up profits. With ghoulish glee Norman consulted his figures to show me how far I was off the track in my selection of the ten worst pictures of the year to date. He was chagrined to find that all but one of them are losing money. The exception was *Stranded in Paris*. But my opinion of it remains unaltered.

* * *

When I viewed *Seventh Heaven* for the first time I thought I had enjoyed the greatest bliss that the screen could provide. But last week I enjoyed even a greater bliss: I viewed *Seventh Heaven* a second time. I had a delicious cry. When I viewed it the first time I was impressed so much with the production as a whole that I did not ask myself what one thing about it gave it its great appeal. After seeing it the second time I left the Circle Theatre with my mind made up that Janet Gaynor is *Seventh Heaven*. I am aware that all the performances are perfect, but there is a soul in the picture, and it is the soul of little "Diane", so marvelously played by Janet Gaynor. All the drama and all the humanity in this wonderfully human production have value to the extent that they bear relation to the central character.

* * *

To me there never is anything pleasant in the sight of people eating. Such scenes on the screen always are more or less disgusting. I believe that the great majority of people agree with me, therefore the majority will like the manner in which a meal is presented in *A Gentleman of Paris*, Adolphe Menjou's latest, directed by D'Arrast. In any picture the important thing is not what there is in a scene but what you see in it. When this meal was over I could not remember having seen any food on the table or having noticed anyone really eating anything. Yet I got the impression that a full breakfast had been served. I don't know how D'Arrast contrived it, for the sequence was over before I was aware of its perfections.

* * *

Someone telephoned me from Glendale the other night that a house over there was showing a Universal picture that had one correctly punctuated title in it. In my haste to see it I was arrested for speeding and missed about one hundred feet of the picture. Somewhere in the part I missed must have been the title that excited my informant.

* * *

And now the Examiner announces in a screaming line across its theatrical page that Marion Davies's sister is to do something or other on the screen. We have grown used to the modest manner in which the Hearst papers

exploit Marion, but it is going to be tough if we have to go through the insuring process over again for each member of her family.

* * *

In opposing the eight-hour day Al Rockett points to himself and says that for the fourteen years he has been in the picture business he has worked from fifteen to twenty hours a day. If he had had a little more sleep during the fourteen years he might by now have something to his credit in addition to Abraham Lincoln.

WARNING!

The readers of The Film Spectator are warned against paying any attention to the articles recently appearing in this magazine on the subject of Life Insurance, signed "RÜNYADHA, LTD."

These articles are evidently written by a "Twister", and are all the more dangerous because the "Twister" has not the nerve to come out and say anything which an insurance representative can contradict.

He merely tells you that you can get back part of what you have paid in, and calls it an overcharge, in the hope that he may invite those who have wisely invested in insurance as a saving to themselves, to seek his advice, and you are warned against paying any attention, or making any inquiries without first consulting your insurance company, which will always give you *free* advice regarding the conditions of the policies which you hold.—ADV.

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STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

THE Spectator has received a letter from "Pink" Wingart, director of publicity for F. B. O., wherein he defends his boss, William LeBaron, vice-president in charge of production at the F. B. O. studios in Hollywood. He says LeBaron should have a better rating than I gave him.

I am certainly sorry to note that Mr. Wingart thinks I am belittling Mr. LeBaron by placing his name as the twelfth best box office supervisor in the fifth largest industry in the United States. I should rather call it quite an honor, especially after looking at the names of numerous successful supervisors who are listed below Mr. LeBaron.

True enough, Mr. LeBaron is one of the best equipped executives in the motion picture business, but as to the statement of no one being able to estimate his worth at the box-office, that is a little off color. Every single supervisor who is rated above LeBaron, has pictures that have averaged better at the box-office in the last eighteen months, or his name would not appear there.

While Mr. LeBaron was the supervisor on Beau Geste and numerous other Paramount successes, he also has had his weaker pictures and box-office flops. While you say that I may not realize all of the great things

that Mr. LeBaron has accomplished, it so happens that for a short time I was in the Famous Players home office at 485 Fifth Avenue, while Mr. LeBaron was supervisor of the Long Island studio. Accordingly, having been a former reporter, as well as being in the picture business for eleven years, there was not much that passed by my ears.

I remember very distinctly when Walter Wanger returned from the coast saying that Ben Schulberg had said "thumbs down" on Beau Geste, as there was no love story to it. And we all know how LeBaron went ahead and made one of the greatest box-office hits of the year out of this story. As a matter of fact, I gave LeBaron full credit for this in my very first "Story of the Box-Office."

But it so happens that the ratings we are giving writers, supervisors, directors and players are not based on one picture, but on all the pictures with which they are credited for the last nineteen months, since January 1, 1926, when this box-office system was inaugurated. If we rated writers, supervisors, etc., on their most successful picture over this period, we would probably find at least 25% of them rated at 100%, including Mr. LeBaron, of course. But since the motion picture business is supposedly

run on a solid rock business basis to make money, we must apply the law of averages, and rate the different members of the personnel on all of their work, instead of on one of their masterpieces.

Before Mr. LeBaron can be called a 100% showman, he must learn the proper development of motion picture stars. Because W. C. Fields was a big legitimate star in New York and scored a hit in a part in one of D. W. Griffith's pictures, and because the Junior stars graduated from the Paramount Actors' School, does not mean that you can star them and make the public accept them.

Thalberg with Billy Haines, and Schulberg with Esther Ralston, have both recently proven the right and only way to make motion picture stars. They have started their respective proteges off in small parts and gradually worked them into featured leads. Then, some time later, when the public decided that they liked them well enough, they were starred. And both of them have been very successfully launched, as you will notice by glancing at the figures on the recent Haines and Ralston pictures.

After LeBaron had found that Tommy Meighan's box-office value was dropping away, he decided to try

PARAMOUNT'S 1927 HONOR ROLL

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From January 1st to May 1st, 1927

TITLES	In Charge of Production	Editor in Chief of Feature Producer	DIRECTOR	WRITERS
"LOVE'S GREATEST MISTAKE"	William LeBaron	Ralph Block	Edward Sutherland	Frederick A. Kummer Becky Gardiner ✓
"CABARET"	William LeBaron	Ralph Block	Robert Vignola	Owen Davis Becky Gardiner ✓

(NOTE—The above two pictures are mentioned in list of Paramount 1927 Honor Roll)

BECKY GARDINER ✓
Writer

DEMMY LAMSON, Mgr.
Ruth Collier, Associate

and build him up in a strong vehicle, *Tin Gods*, by giving him an excellent director, Allan Dwan, and a strong supporting cast with such names as Renee Adoree, Aileen Pringle and William Powell.

This worked out very well. But LeBaron, instead of benefiting by the knowledge of the huge box-office returns on this picture, reverted to his former regime of making cheap Meighan pictures, with the result that the next two releases, *The Canadian*, and *Blind Alleys*, are both practically rated as box-office failures, as they have dropped to 70%.

Undoubtedly, the biggest flop of all those made under LeBaron's supervision was D. W. Griffith's costly production, *The Sorrows of Satan*. After the failure of *The Sorrows of Satan* as a road-show in New York, it was released on the regular Paramount program as a special, and dropped to 79% on the rating list. It is the general consensus of opinion that it only held this rating on the strength of Menjou's name. Many of his program pictures have done much better than this one at the box-office.

One of the last pictures LeBaron supervised before leaving the Long Island studio was *Rubber Heels*, starring Ed Wynn. This picture has been re-cut and re-titled and is still such a hopeless mess that the Paramount home office is trying to figure out if it should release it or burn it.

It is certainly surprising that after the failure of W. C. Fields, Eddie

Cantor, Beatrice Lillie, Leon Errol, and numerous other legitimate stars to make good in the same status on the screen, Lasky and LeBaron still thought that they could elevate another New York stage star, Ed Wynn. But I suppose we must all live and learn:

During the production of the 1926-27 Paramount Pictures, that company waged a competitive battle between its Eastern and Western studios to determine which studio could turn out the best product at the least cost. Monte Katterjohn was made the drive captain of the Western studio, and Henry Salsbury of the Eastern studio. When Schulberg's Western studio finally won out, Paramount closed its Long Island studio, moving all of its units West, and appointing Mr. LeBaron to a position in the Paramount home-office. A very short time later we heard that Joe Kennedy, president of F. B. O., had signed LeBaron to go West and take charge of the F. B. O. studios in Hollywood.

First: Adolph Zukor is on the board of directors of a New Jersey bank that has much to do with the financing of F. B. O. pictures.

Second: Paramount bought a foreign Sascha production, *Moon of Israel*, and because it was too similar to their own production, *The Ten Commandments*, to put in their own houses, they turned it over to F. B. O. for distribution last May. Lee Marcus of F. B. O. recently booked this picture into the Roxy.

Third: Although Joe Kennedy is still producing the Fred Thomson pictures at the F. B. O. studios, he is releasing them through the Paramount exchanges. This is easily explained when we consider the number of houses controlled by Publix, plus the fact that a Paramount exchange can ask an independent exhibitor a much higher rental for a "Western" than an F. B. O. exchange can. Exhibitors will probably remember back in 1916 that Paramount not only had the Famous Players-Lasky exchanges, but that it leaked out that they also owned the Realart exchanges for handling their cheaper program pictures, and then again in 1918, that they also owned the Arcraft exchanges.

Fourth: Many executives, directors and players have been switched directly from the Paramount to the F. B. O. payroll. Among these are William LeBaron, Ed King, Wallace Fox, George B. Seitz, Richard Rosson, Margaret Morris and other Junior Stars of the Paramount Actors' School.

In conclusion, I still say that while LeBaron has proven himself a master showman, his record is not nearly as strong at the box-office as Thalberg and Schulberg, whom I still contend hold the biggest executive positions in the industry and probably will continue to do so for some time.

The *Stolen Bride* again shows Billie Dove's perfect taste in dress.

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SUN UP

For sheer human-ness it would be very difficult indeed to find a play with greater depth or sincerity than *Sun Up*, at the Egan theatre, or a finer actress than Lucille la Verne. The play has a repressed force and a stirring straightness of purpose that hold its audience from the first to the last moment, and in the interpretation given to it by Miss la Verne, both in her acting and direction, there is the same greatness that characterizes all her work. Largely it is a story of mother-love. Simplicity is its chief attribute; the simplicity of the mountains and the people of the mountains who, if necessary, will daringly disregard a law, but to whom the law of hospitality or the bond of a promise can only be broken by death. It is a great play greatly rendered, and it is well worth a visit.

CONVOY

Convoy is such a terrible picture that I refuse to dignify it by putting a review of it among the other reviews in this issue. The story might have been supplied by someone who stopped advancing mentally when he had become almost simple-minded, and the direction made it worse. When the shots provided by the U. S. Naval department were not on the screen there was nothing to interest the audience. The whole thing is a pitiful attempt at picture-making.

FOOLISH

The Fox studio prides itself upon its staff of young University chaps who read the stories submitted by authors. The fact that none of them knows anything about pictures does not temper the pride. What the Fox story department and all other such departments need are readers who have lived long enough to know something about life, something that no university on earth can teach. The Fox policy is one of the prize follies of 1927.

WHERE'S THE COMEDY?

In *He's My Daddy*, Reg Denny's latest, packages are piled on a chauffeur's outstretched arms until they tower above his head, making it impossible for him to see where he is going. This is one of the institutional bits of screen comedy. There is nothing funny in it, but someone started doing it years ago, and our present crop of directors apparently can not think beyond it.

Will Act as Secretary to motion picture artist or executive, or handle fan mail; familiar with industry; free to travel.

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PRODUCTION VALUES

By MARY O'HARA

IN AN earlier issue of *The Spectator*, I advanced the theory that in the making of every picture, four talents are needed: that of writer, playwright, photographic artist and director. An analysis of certain well-known screen personalities will show clearly just what I mean.

In seeing a picture it is easy to know whether or not there has been a photographic artist on the job, or a playwright, etc. But unless one has been in close touch with the picture in the making, one can not name with any certainty the artists responsible for those "invisible production values". It might so easily happen that the photographic artist is an insignificant assistant of some kind; or the playwright a friend of the writer or director with whom he hob-nobs in off hours. So I will begin with some directors for whom I have written scenarios.

Rex Ingram is the photographic artist-director, and in a small way writer, too. His pictures are always, first and foremost, beautiful. He was a writer before he became a director and although he usually supplements his ability in this line with another writer, yet this gift supplies him with business and atmosphere. But as a playwright he is utterly lacking. He always shoots a vast deal too much—insists upon doing so—is unaware that a picture as a whole needs qualities of rhythm and balance quite as much as atmosphere and beauty, and will always sacrifice construction for the particular effects or situations to which he is partial. He should be sure that whatever writer he has with him is also a playwright, or that he has both.

John Stahl, on the contrary, is primarily a playwright. He is the director-playwright. More than any director with whom I have ever worked does he understand the importance of balance and rhythm, preparation, climax, footage—of working effectively within limits. It must be very rare that he over-shoots to any great extent. Therefore, his pictures are as smooth as a chromatic scale and are never manhandled in the cutting. They are to the point and say what they intend to say, and usually look as if nothing had been shot that is not in the picture. But they are always drab and uninteresting to the eye. He needs a photographic artist, and he needs a fluent writer.

* * *

Frank Lloyd's abilities are similar to Stahl's. He is not, I believe, so thoroughly trained a playwright, but he has that type of logical, analytical mind and sufficient experience to have become highly efficient. This combination of director-playwright is always efficient, but not always brilliant or artistic. Lloyd should have a fluent writer and a photographic artist. It seems that the abilities of photo-

graphic artist and playwright are rarely found in one person. At this moment I can not think of a single case.

King Vidor, with the exception of D. W. Griffith, comes nearer than any other big director to combining all these abilities in his one person. Left alone to choose his own material and make a picture, the result would show Vidor to be a writer, playwright (to a moderate extent) and director, but not a photographic artist. This lack would of course never interfere with a director's success. The general public does not demand beauty nor criticize the lack of it, but it does praise it and delight in it when it occurs. If more pictures had it the standard would be raised and the public would become more educated along that line.

* * *

To mention a couple for whom I have not written, but who are striking examples familiar to all:

Von Stroheim is a writer-director. If he realized his lack of the playwright's ability and believed as I do that such an ability is of paramount importance in making a picture, he would supply himself with a playwright whose mind and talents were such that he could collaborate happily with him. Then we would see on the screen something resembling Von Stroheim's original vision of his pictures, which I think has never happened up to date. It is inevitably mutilated in the cutting; sometimes the story is not even told; the point is lost entirely. Material which has a correct balance and charming rhythm in one hundred thousand feet, can not possibly have them in ten thousand feet. Von Stroheim also needs a photographic artist, for his pictures are not beautiful to the eye.

Ferdinand Pinney Earle is a photographic artist of the most extraordinary ability. Nothing more beautiful than his *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* ever has appeared on the screen. But it was not dramatic and not interesting; and few people are so appreciative of mere beauty that they are willing to sit for an hour or more seeing a succession of beautiful photographs. It is a crying shame if Earle does not find an outlet upon the screen for his unique talent. But he, too, should take stock, should know himself, should understand that although he is unusually gifted, it is along one line only, and that if he should produce another picture, he can not expect success unless he supplies himself with a writer and a playwright and a director.

* * *

Let no one think that I would approve of four people making a picture, all with equal authority. Such a thing would be impossible. It is hard enough to get two people to agree. No, I go to the opposite extreme. I agree with those who say that a picture should

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be made by one person. Rex Ingram once said to me, "Making a picture is a one-man job, and one man can't do it." This is true. The answer is, collaboration. Let each man know just what his own ability is. Let him not deceive himself. Let him then get what other talent he needs. He will find it impossible to collaborate with certain people, and very possible, in fact inspiring, to collaborate with others. Every one knows this. It is a matter of mental affinity. Let him keep all the authority in his own hands and make all final decisions as to what shall and shall not go into the picture, himself, so that the picture will be a cross section of life seen through one single eye, as every work of art must be. Only in this way can we have originality on the screen and get away from the deadly monotony of films as they are now. Moreover, this

is the only way the undertaking could be carried to a successful conclusion. There must be a general to every army if it is to function.

This general, or supervisor, as he is called in the industry, should be that one of the four artists whom I have described who is intrusted by the producer with the responsibility of the production. And he should have the responsibility for the failure or success of the picture, with no opportunity to pass the buck. And the producer should really trust him with the picture, and allow no one to interfere, nor interfere himself.

This would amount to a revival of the unit system, of which I am strongly in favor, with the supervisor one of the picture-makers, instead of a business manager, or an executive of the organization.

called "American" type of comedy. And yet the producers continue to think them morons.

* * *

What is the matter with our producers, anyway?

I used to go to a cheap picture house downtown and see all the screen plays. The audience was made up of people engaged in business and trade on Spring and Main streets—Mexicans, Italians, Irishmen, sailors, men who worked in second-hand book stores, pawnbrokers, clerks, stenographers, mothers with babies in their arms, old ladies, old soldiers, pick-pockets (I had my purse stolen there once), precise ladies with "Science and Health" tucked under their arms, I. W. W.'s, negroes and a Chinaman or two. A more representative audience it would be hard to find.

Once they were showing *The Tower of Lies*, directed by Victor Seastrom. When the last reel flickered to a finish there was a staccato burst of applause. And yet this is the type of audience for which those godawful serials are made.

The Tower of Lies was reviewed in one of our "highbrow" periodicals. In the review the old myth once more raised its head. The review said that *The Tower of Lies* was superb, a very great picture, "an epic of the soil", etc., and added, "but doubtless the public will not appreciate it".

Why insult the public's intelligence this way?

Why not give the poor and continually-damned public a chance?

* * *

But let's get down to business; let's talk of salesmanship!

You can't peddle clothes-brushes from door to door, from family to family and say, "These are fine clothes-brushes, the best ever made—but I doubt if any but people used to expensive and foreign-made clothes-brushes would know how to use them or get any good out of them."

Do you think the housewife, or the father of the family, or the son or daughter of the house would buy after such a sales talk? Not on your life! They'd shut the door in your face. You couldn't sell a brush and, of course, you might go about lamenting the fact that the "American" people were unappreciative and too dumb to know well made brushes when they met them.

Why not sell these people the brushes first because of their actual value? Undoubtedly, for we are an adaptable nation, they would soon learn to use them with skill and understanding. They might even order more.

* * *

Recently a nice little wife who is a neighbor of mine looked through the photoplay reviews of the week. She and her husband wanted to go to the theatre Sunday afternoon. I advised one of the pictures showing downtown, a picture they both would have appreciated. But unfortunately a review of the picture had in it the

THE GREAT HOLLYWOOD MYTH

By MADELEINE MATZEN

IT'S a myth carefully manufactured by the heads of the picture trust. It is widely broadcast by highly paid press agents; you see mention of it in the fan magazines, for fan magazines have policies and are obliged to print the things dictated by those who advertise in their publications. The myth has been repeated so many times that those who manufactured it have actually grown to believe it is true, like the liar who repeated his lies until he believed them himself.

It is the myth which insists that the average motion picture spectator does not appreciate good pictures, that artistic, consistent pictures telling the truth about life have no box-office value, that those who go to the motion pictures are morons and not very high grade morons at that.

* * *

Now I think this is a most unappreciative and ungrateful attitude on the part of the producers who have wrested huge fortunes from the very public whom they so basely malign. Incidentally it is a stupid myth to invent, it isn't even interesting to read about. The absurdity of it is very apparent, for while with one statement the producer clamors about the moron condition of the public, with another he flatters it by catering to its preferences, by asking its "advice" (which he never heeds and cares nothing about).

When, by sheer accident, some brave director makes a truly beautiful picture the producer again flatters the public by press agenting the fact that "he has made an artistic picture which he is sure the public will appreciate". What he means is that he fears he has made a box-office flop and by dint of much flattery handed out to the public he hopes to make at least a FEW hundred thousands on the picture. But a beautiful picture is always appreciated by the majority of the public. All of which, of course,

greatly astonishes the producer. It seems stupid and ill bred to apologize publicly for making a well nigh perfect picture—and yet the producers continue to do so.

When Lubitsch made that scintillant picture, *The Marriage Circle*, the critics acclaimed it, but fed by the propaganda of the producers, they leavened their praise by intimating that the picture doubtless would only appeal to a few—those few who knew their "continental angle". This is amusing, inasmuch as America is made up of continentals, people in whose blood is bred an understanding of the continental view of life and love.

* * *

The Marriage Circle did not make a great deal of money—this was because it was something new in the way of a story. Most people have to acquire a taste for olives—the great American public saw the picture and made no comment; they neither condemned nor praised it, but went home and thought it over.

After thinking it over, so well did they show their appreciation of this type of story that a new school of directorship sprang into being—the school which gave us Monta Bell and Mal St. Clair and Menjou (I mention Menjou, the actor, because to him belongs so much of the credit for the finesse displayed in the direction of *A Woman of Paris*).

Evidently Bell and St. Clair gave the public credit for average intelligence and some little humor; they risked their jobs and made the type of pictures they enjoyed making and to-day they are hauling down big salaries.

The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer pictures featuring Lew Cody, Aileen Pringle and Norma Shearer were all made because the public showed very plainly that they appreciated sophisticated comedy, the continental type of humor as well as the un-subtle, so-

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phrase "a little over the heads of the public". The wife promptly decided that it was one of those "arty things" and they went to see Tom Mix instead—and were bored.

If you ask me who the morons are, I'd say they were not the public—but the dear producers themselves, who have invented a strange myth that has grown like a Frankenstein and threatens to engulf them.

Wasn't there a legend somewhere about killing the goose that laid the golden egg? The producers would do well to study this legend carefully and forget their own little myth.

On my desk lies the weekly news letter sent to me from the First Na-

tional Studios. In it is publicity concerning Carey Wilson's production of *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. Mr. Wilson plans to make a sophisticated, a different, VERY different, screen play out of the novel. He wonders (in the letter) whether the public will be "ready" for it. I say more power to Mr. Wilson. I hope it will be a big picture. Doubtless he will spend a small fortune in making it—but why kill its chances of success by allowing the old myth to rule its advance notices? If it's a good picture the public will be sure to appreciate it! And when they do, probably Mr. Wilson will be the most surprised man in all of Hollywood.

most famous but least known geniuses the world ever has had. Everyone has heard his name, but not one in a thousand can give any details of his romantic life. His biography, *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*, throws a new light on his life and the interesting times in which he lived. A great amount of very thorough research must have been necessary to the writing of this book, as it is full of things which could have been obtained in no other way.

This book does not glorify Leonardo. On the other hand, after one reads it, one wonders how da Vinci became so famous. None of the reverence that was felt for Leonardo during his life was mentioned in the book.

Da Vinci is not the one and only outstanding character in the story; there are many others who are equally prominent. The weird customs of the times also occupy a lot of space. These customs are the most interesting part of the book to me. Some of them are disgusting and revolting, but all are very interesting, and some of them are very funny.

The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci is written by Dimitri Merejkowski and is translated from the Russian by Herbert Trench. As a rule, translations detract from the story; but this one is very well done, in that the style is not as stilted as is usual in translations. These two volumes were lent to me by Edward Everett Horton. I am going to lend him my *Napoleon*, by Ludwig.

* * *

Among other books I read, were several stories by modern popular authors and I disliked nearly all of them. When one has a chance to read books like the three I have mentioned, there is no reason to read trash, which is all most of these modern books are.

* * * * *

The various producers who are making comedies from the papers are overlooking a good bet in "Harold Teen". A picture, or series of pictures, based on the various adventures of "Harold Teen" would be bound to go over big. "Harold" is official fad arbitrator for a huge following of high school students, and all his following would flock to see him on the screen.

Dear Dad:

So many people have been kind to me while I have been sick that I don't know how to thank them. In this predicament, just as when I was pinched for speeding, I turn to you first. Maybe you can express my thanks to them.

This is what I want you to thank them for. When I was first sick, I spent some days in the hospital. It was around Easter, and soon my room was full of lilies and other flowers. There were also letters, big bundles of them. Some of the letters and flowers were from people I knew personally, but a lot of them were from people I only knew on the screen. All these people, out of the kindness of

AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — The Spectator's 17-Year-Old Critic

(During the past five months The Spectator has gained several thousand new readers. Prior to that time the editor's son conducted a department in the paper. He started it when he was fifteen years old. When producers turn out a poor picture they advance as an alibi that they made it that way to appeal to the fifteen-year-old mind of the audience. Donald's department was started in order to give us an idea of how they were appealing to at least one fifteen-year-old mind. At all times The Spectator published what he wrote exactly as he wrote it. During his long convalescence the itch to write is returning to him. He has seen no pictures, but he has read many books, and it was his own idea that he should discuss them. I hope his health will permit him to keep on writing, for I believe he made many friends among Spectator readers.—W. B.

AS BOOKS are the best things in the world to pass the time, I got a lot to read while I was sick. A couple of my books were brought to me by Bill Hart, who is himself an author. He and Dad made up my mind that it would be a good thing to write a few remarks about some of the numerous literary efforts I have read.

* * *

Mr. Hart sponsored the idea of an article, so I'm going to start with one of his books, *The Lighter of Flames*. The story deals with a character in American history who is more famous for his desire for liberty than for his other deeds: Patrick Henry, one of the greatest orators America ever has known. The portion of Henry's life outlined in this book is in the stirring times immediately preceding the American Revolution.

* * *

The style of the author is vigorous and the story is well arranged. The reader becomes more and more absorbed until the story reaches its dramatic climax in Henry's famous "Give me liberty or give me death!" speech. The love story is also well arranged,

as the outcome of it is in doubt until the end.

In the matter of drawing characters, Mr. Hart has been very adroit. The central character, Patrick Henry, is especially well done, in that he has the sympathy of the reader at all times. By turns he is pathetic, heroic, and, in his oratory, divine. The other characters, as may be expected, are not quite as perfect as the main one, but all are well drawn and are exceptionally true to life.

The Lighter of Flames is a book which would make a very good moving picture. The story is one that could do a lot for the screen right now, as it might start a new vogue in pictures, something which would be quite welcome at present.

* * *

For yet another very interesting book I am indebted to Mr. Hart, although he did not write this one himself. The book is *Riata and Spurs*, written by Charlie Siringo, one of the very few old Western cowpunchers still alive. Siringo has been through some of the most hair-raising experiences I ever have read.

Like most real Westerners, Siringo has a deep contempt for the average movie type of cowboy. Some of the illustrations in the book show cowboys dressed in clothes no self-respecting screen cowboy would ever put on. No audience would swallow such a gross deception as they would believe to have been worked on them if screen cowpunchers wore the correct clothes.

Riata and Spurs also would make a good picture. That is, some of the various adventures could be written into a complete story. The numerous and picturesque outlaws would make great character studies. Maybe some of them, such as the gentleman who shot the sheriff and then shot all the witnesses of his deed, would be a bit too rough for screen fare.

Siringo injects into his writing the spirit of the cowpuncher, something which many more famous authors have tried in vain to do.

* * *

Leonardo da Vinci is one of the

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HE. 7715

their hearts, sat down and wrote me letters to cheer me up. To my mind that is one of the finest acts of friendship that can be performed by anyone.

When I came home and could have visitors, then my friends saw to it that I didn't have time to worry about being sick. The walls of my room gradually became covered with photographs, so that I always had visitors in spirit, if not in flesh. Several times actor friends, having only one day off from work, would give up a few hours of that short time in visiting me. Other friends gave up some of their summer pleasures to help me pass the time away. That was one of the finest evidences of friendship, the unselfish way my friends gave up their time to keep me cheered up.

When my birthday rolled around, the first I ever have had in bad health,

it was made the best I ever have had by my wonderful set of friends. From the time I woke up in the morning until I went to sleep at night, telegrams wishing me happiness kept coming steadily. Those fine messages would have made my birthday notable, even if I hadn't had visitors all day. There were telegrams from people I have never met, but who wanted to do a kind act. More friends came to see me during the day, making it the happiest I ever have had.

Now, if you could in some way express my thanks to all these people, I would be much obliged; because I could never do it adequately myself. Even you could not do it completely, for there are not words enough in even your dictionary to express my appreciation for all that has been done for me.

DONALD.

VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

A FAN SPEAKS

Dear Sir:

As an ardent movie fan, I feel urged to express myself on the subject of your contention that it is stories and not stars that fill the theatre.

You are both right and wrong.

I assume that I am like thousands of other movie fans. Now, personally, I always go to see Thomas Meighan's pictures. I take in all of Corrinne Griffith's. Two of them, *Declasse* and *Classified*, I went to see twice on account of the sheer beauty of the close-ups. (I suppose you won't read any farther after that terrible confession.)

Clive Brook, Eugene O'Brien, Renee Adoree and Blanche Sweet are other names that bring me to the box-office.

But you are perfectly right in contending that a star loses his or her box-office value when they are placed in poor stories. Richard Dix is an unfortunate sufferer in that respect. And Clara Bow, who was delightful in *Dancing Mothers*, *Mantrap* and *The Plastic Age*, has lost her appeal for me in the poor stories in which she has been starred this year.

ROBERT S. SHILLAKER.

TITLE PUNCTUATION

Dear Mr. Beaton:

In reading *The Film Spectator* I observe your frequent allusion to "proper" and to "correct" punctuation. In view of the indefinable character of your qualifiers I hope my comment may not be "improper" or my conclusions "incorrect".

When symbols were first devised by the Egyptians and Assyrians to express thought there was no punctuation whatever. It was developed much later as the necessity for better expression became manifest. In the ancient Hebrew vowels were not used and words were not even separated. It was not until the tenth century of the present era that punctuation marks were used in transcribing the old texts, and such sacrilegious tampering with the word of God was

vigorously reprobated by the clergy. Fortunately no such restrictions were imposed upon profane writings, and punctuation developed to the point where Hart, Genung, Beadwell, Teall, or Husband was permitted to vex and annoy school children with it. They could impose their laws upon a helpless child but not upon the men who paid the cost of hand-set type, so commas, colons and semicolons were ruthlessly discarded, and "newspaper punctuation" supplanted "book punctuation" in popularity. Then "came the dawn" of a new literature with novel requirements—the motion picture title.

Book punctuation and newspaper punctuation are both proper and correct; but will either meet the full requirements of the screen? Punctuation of titles seems to be a matter that addresses itself peculiarly to the common sense of the writer bent on conveying his exact meaning with the fewest words and in the shortest time, and in achieving that effect all laws should be disregarded.

Before an actor speaks a line on the stage he has rehearsed it for weeks, and with the aid of the voice and accompanying gesture he is able to render the line exactly as designed. By a convention of the screen we understand that when a printed title appears an actor is speaking. But he is invisible and silent, so the audience gets no gestures or nuances. For the moment the audience becomes the actor and must, without rehearsal and in the brief moment the title is visible, translate it with absolute accuracy. The audience is not given time to recall the gesture that immediately preceded the speech, nor to recall the speech when a gesture follows it.

Under such restrictions is not the title writer justified in resorting to any mechanical expedient that will aid the audience—dashes of varying length to show agitation, confusion or hesitation, and italics (which you also condemn) to place emphasis exactly

where it is required? For example, the simple reply, "I don't know," may be rendered in so many different ways, each pregnant with meaning. "I dunno," "I—don't—know"! "I don't know," "I don't—know," etc.

After all, the best title is the one that is brought into such perfect harmony with the action that it seems to be an inseparable part of it. The finest compliment I ever heard on a set of titles came from Mary Pickford. When Ernest Lubitsch asked her how she liked the titles in *The Marriage Circle*, which she had just viewed, she looked bewildered for an instant, then replied:

"Titles? Were there any?"

I wrote those titles. Mr. Lubitsch merely dictated them.

J. R.

P. S.—Kindly correct my punctuation.

J. R.

(J. R. has me wrong. I do not object to either dashes or italics. Both are necessary in presenting titles, but I contend that they should be used properly. In a Warner Brothers picture italics were used without rhyme nor reason. I said so, and as a result, J. R. seems to have jumped to the conclusion that I object to their use, even though they be used correctly. The reason that J. R. offers as an excuse for a departure from conventional punctuation in titles, I advance as an argument in favor of it. The less an audience has to help it in grasping readily the meaning of a title, the harder it is for it to understand the meaning. Therefore it should have all the help possible. No help can be greater than conventional punctuation—the kind of punctuation that the reader encounters everywhere except on the screen. The farther you depart from the system to which he is accustomed, the more difficult it is for him to grasp the meaning of a title.—W. B.)

OH, VERY WELL

My Dear Mr. Beaton:

As a reader of your admirable publication, I wish to commend you for your staunch stand against the film producers who are attempting to oppress the entire industry.

Not only are you correct in your assertion that they are against *The Film Spectator*, but I wish to inform you confidentially that they are plotting to put you out of business, along with some of the other motion picture journals. They are forbidding their help to advertise with you.

I can not reveal the source of my information, but you may rely upon it that the producers have banded together to keep you from exposing their faults.

Have courage, however. There are many who will stick with you, and the producers will lose out in the long run through their incompetence. Just hit them all the harder and their cowardice will eventually assert itself. In the end the public itself is going to run these men out of business.

J. B. H.

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L. A. HOWLAND

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August 11, 1927.

Mr. Hugh A. Beaton, Jr.,
President and Managing Director,
Roosevelt Hotel Company,
Hollywood Professional Building,
Hollywood, California.

EDWARD LEVEQUE

Dear Mr. Beaton:

I have just returned to Grauman's Chinese Theatre from a tour of inspection of the new, magnificent Roosevelt Hotel and to say that I am pleased with Hollywood's latest, splendid hotel structure is putting it mildly.

I believe it will fill a long felt want in Hollywood for a truly metropolitan hotel, of the calibre of the bigger and finer New York hosteleries.

In addition to it being an ideal stopping place for the thousands of tourists visiting Southern California yearly I know scores of prominent celebrities of the motion picture world will want to maintain permanent apartments in your institution.

I am sure it will be a hotel of which not alone Hollywood, but all of California and the entire west can well be proud, and an architectural triumph that will be famed throughout the civilized world.

In looking over the artistic furnishings and charming decorations I know that no expense or pains is being spared to make it a high class, distinctive institution, with every modern comfort and luxury the mind of man can conceive.

That it will be maintained on a plane to satisfy the most fastidious and exacting under your capable direction, I feel sure, from the success you have made of similar institutions in the past.

Please accept my heartiest congratulations and sincerest wishes for the new Roosevelt Hotel, as well as my thanks as a Hollywood booster, for what I believe will mark a great step in advance in the business and social life of the world's film capital.

Sincerely yours,

Ed Grauman

桃源洞内蓬萊島
别有天地非人間

For Reservations and Information in Reference to Roosevelt Hotel,
Telephone GLadstone 1793

Edited by
WELFORD BEATON

THE 20 Cents
FILM SPECTATOR

Published In Hollywood Every Other Saturday

Vol. 4

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No. 2

While the editor is away
holidaying, articles for this issue
have been contributed by:

JOSEPH JACKSON

F. ELY PAGET

DOROTHY HARRISON

WALTER ANTHONY

LENORE COFFEE

PAUL SCHOFIELD

TOM REID

HENRY IRVING DODGE

BENJAMIN S. KUTLER

K. C. B.

GRANT CARPENTER

TOM MIRANDA

LOUIS JACOBIN

ANOTHER LETTER TO MR. MAYER

TRINITY 1173

Western Costume Company

935 SOUTH BROADWAY

Los Angeles

August 25, 1927

Mr. Louis B. Mayer,
Culver City, California.

Dear Sir:

Bess Meredyth, Edward Knoblock, Hugo Ballin, George Fitzmaurice, Frank Lloyd, Douglas Fairbanks, D. W. Griffith, Harry Pollard, Maurice Stiller, Jack Ford, Roland Lee, Erich von Stroheim, Alan Crossland, William Koenig, Al Rockett, Henry King, John Barrymore, Rod La Rocque and others of the same high standing in the picture industry, use the Research and Technical facilities of the Western Costume Company.

AND YET - in the last two years no Director, important executive or Star of your organization (excepting Ramon Navarro, Colonel McCoy and Roy D'Arcy) has taken advantage of this FREE service offered by our company.

In order to use a thing one must have an exact knowledge of it.

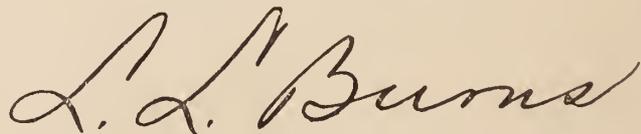
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Wouldn't it be advantageous to have your capable people exactly familiar with the potentialities of our three and a half million dollar stock and the accurate data to be obtained in our Research Department?

We feel this is a matter very worthy of your attention.

Yours sincerely,

WESTERN COSTUME COMPANY,



LLB.VMS.

President.

THE FILM SPECTATOR

EVERY OTHER SATURDAY

Published by

FILM SPECTATOR, INCORPORATED
WELFORD BEATON, *President and Editor*

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The only publication conducted solely for those who
THINK about motion pictures.

HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, SEPT. 17, 1927

SOME TELEGRAMS

Olympic Hotel, Hollywood, Calif.
Seattle, Washington

Do you know where Welford Beaton is? If you can get in touch with him tell him that we are swamped with articles for contributors' number of Spectator and don't know what to do about it.

DOROTHY HARRISON.

* * *

Dorothy Harrison, Seattle, Wash.
Film Spectator,
Hollywood, Calif.

Mr. Beaton fishing near Skykomish. He swore over telephone and said to tell you to publish shortest article first, next shortest second, and so on until you have no space left, then notify other writers that their articles will appear in subsequent issues.

OLYMPIC HOTEL.

* * *

Film Spectator, Skykomish, Wash.
Hollywood, Calif.

Don't bother me. Much too busy. Tell Jean Hersholt, Tom Miranda, Eddie Laemmle, Ernst Lubitsch, Doug Fairbanks, Frank Bushman, Adolphe Menjou, Jim Young and Mike Levee trout on way to them by airplane. Notify Cecil de Mille that I have copyright on miracle of turning trout into flying fish.

W. B.

The Jealous Old Cat!

Dear Brother Beaton:

Your letter of August 16th moved me to tears. I am so far behind in my work that the thought of taking a vacation is inconceivable. The thought of writing an article so that you might take a vacation is so ironical that I can hardly bear it. Suppose you finish my second volume of George Washington, keep up my weekly syndicate, and write a number of short stories that I am behind on and let me take a vacation.

Otherwise I hope you choke.

Yours with much loathing,

RUPERT HUGHES.

Scenario Writing Made Easy

By JOSEPH JACKSON

THE most important step in planning a career as a scenario writer is to get a job at a large salary.

It is important that the stipend be high, for unless it is, the producer will not take your efforts seriously; his attitude will always be, "How can that guy write anything good? He's only getting \$200 a week."

The next thing is to train your voice, for stories are sold by talking, not by writing. It might even be wise to take a course in elocution and acting, so that you can imbue your story with dramatic fervor as you relate it.

A liberal sprinkling of profanity gives virility and power to the telling of a drama. Thus:

A dirty, lousy _____ walks down a dark, narrow alley until he comes to a hole in the wall that leads to a dive. The _____ enters the dive and meets a dame, who is just coming out. "Where have I seen that _____ before?" he asks himself. Then he remembers, turns on her, mad as a _____, "You _____! You filthy little _____! Trying to hold out on me, are you? I'll smash your _____ head for you!"

The technique of retailing a comedy is, of course, entirely different. The narrator should give the impression that he can hardly speak for laughing. When approaching an especially good spot, preface it with: "Jesus! This one is funny! I told it to Hy Goof this morning and he said it was the funniest gag of the year."

It is inadvisable to put fresh situations into a story, as there is no precedent for judging whether they will be effective or not. You can always justify an old one by

HEAR! HEAR!

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Ye Editor's away,

Seeking relaxation,

Learning anew to play;

List to the birdies warble,

List to the whispering trees

When ye Editor goes fishin'

And takes his bloomin' ease.

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Each dog must have his fling:

The Poet's slipped his tether

And the muse is on the wing;

A bas the motion picture,

Vive the thought sublime

That this bum verse don't hafta

Be a cinematic rhyme.

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

The gull on the storm doth ride,

The ships from the seven oceans

Come in with the swelling tide;

High is the gate of heaven,

Dark are the deeps below—

And the creaky escalera

Is the motion picture show.

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Let joy be unrefined,

For Evolution's triumph

Is the motion picture mind;

And scenes which now affront us,

When touched by genius' fire,

Will reflect in warm effulgence

The sheen of the heart's desire.

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

pointing to the success it had in such and such a picture.

In making a screen adaptation of a book or play always introduce important changes in the story, whether necessary or not. Unless you do, your work will not be considered "creative".

Above everything else, have confidence in yourself and your work. If your voice lets down once in the telling of a story, the producer will know that you are doubtful and he will take on the same mood. Your rendition must be a *tour de force*.

Ride up to the studio in a big car, driven by a chauffeur. Everybody knows that there is a direct relationship between the horse-power of the motor and the author's brain.

Turn out brilliant stories, work hard, follow these rules, and you are sure to be a success.

Metropolis

By F. ELY PAGET

IN VIEWING *Metropolis* one is forced to the conclusion that the Germans have an art peculiarly their own. Evidently they regard the screen as a universal vehicle of expression, which it is not; inasmuch as the stage has its limitations, so has the screen, though they are less exacting.

It is quite evident that the picture as we see it, is in an incomplete form, and yet it is too long. It is my opinion that no picture can successfully sustain the interest of the spectator if it is of inordinate length.

This picture could have been made nowhere else but in Germany.

To begin with, the central figure is a synthetic human, as in *Frankenstein*; or again the *Golem of Prague*.

But Mrs. Shelley's story and the *Golem* are pictured as legendary, and the glamor of the medieval atmosphere takes some of the incredibility from the theme.

Not so in *Metropolis*. It is so modern, it is not even contemporaneous. I think a mistake was made in showing the manufacture of the automaton in such minute detail, as it has every aspect of hocus pocus, and whatever we know or do not know, we are all fairly set in the belief that human beings will never be made by machinery, however advanced the age.

An effort to deal with fantasy from the viewpoint of uncompromising realism, must always be more or less unconvincing. In this picture, the whole episode might just as well have been omitted. Would it not have been just as possible to have got the desired effect by changing Mary's soul instead of her body, a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde situation? Also it would have had the added benefit of plausibility.

The symbolic part is a bit overdone, especially the shuffling tramp of the workers, and their straining at their work. Machinery perfected as we see it here will lighten the task of the worker, rather than add to it. I tried to convince myself that it was an absolute necessity to turn the hands on the big dial by hand, but I could not get it out of the back of my mind, that if it had been an Edison machine, there would have been a wheel, or some labor-saving gadget to turn them.

This, and many other effects may be charged to the Teutonic sense of the theatrical which ruins much of their screen work. The main fault of the picture, however, lies

in the story. It is too impersonal. We get no intimate insight into the lives of the characters. Even the love of Masterman for his son is but lightly touched on, till his father sees him in danger of death. The home of the discharged clerk, or the family life of No. 7, for instance, would have added human touches.

The trouble is, the whole thing is done on too stupendous a scale, making it impossible to inject intimate details of the many characters. When we have said all this, we have said all on the con side. Technically, and photographically, the picture is outstanding, and gives evidence that many brains have gone to its construction. The meticulous care given to casting type is marvelous, when you discover that every perfect type is also a competent artist. Brigitte Helm, being the only woman, is naturally pre-eminent, and one wonders how the Germans can introduce a leading woman in every big picture, who, though practically unknown to the world at large, proves to be a sensation. It would be hard to duplicate the remarkable versatility shown by the actress.

The picture has evidently been ruthlessly slashed, and the cutting might have been better, as it is visible in spots where eliminations have been made in scenes.

There are faults in tempo. Froelich, evidently of the Fairbanks school, moves far too swiftly. While the picture ranks as a great achievement, one feels that one such picture in a decade is sufficient. Anyhow, it is too good a picture to have the Paramount brand slapped on it.

The Motion Picture—a Composite Art

By WALTER ANTHONY

WHEN a composer finds a symphony adrift in his system, bumping about and blocking the regular traffic of his thoughts, there's nothing to prevent him getting rid of it intact. Every thought and shade of thought; every dissonance and polyphonic pattern will be transcribed, printed and played as it was intended. If the performance be not so fine as the creator's concept, there is always access to the printed page and justification for the composer.

The painter stands in much the same relation to his art, there being nothing to prevent him from exposing his vision if he command paint, brushes and canvas, technic being presupposed. So it is with the sculptor and likewise even with the novelist. The playwright, too, can order his characters about to suit himself; the mechanical processes involved are of secondary importance and commanded with comparative ease.

But who shall write a motion picture play? Through how many hands does the initial conception pass before it reaches the screen? Douglas Fairbanks knows. He was the first to use the phrase, "building a picture", instead of "writing a picture". Pictures are not written. They are manufactured.

One of the most stupid, anomalous and common expressions in our business is that which relates to the makers of scenario product, as writers. Not a very large percentage of them are capable of writing at all, in the real sense of the word. When they are best and most effective they are not "writers", but makers of stories. If it were otherwise the picture industry would not flourish, since it is a fact that the best "writers" are not engaged in it. Indeed, the very qualities that give a writer

distinction are qualities undesirable in a picture, except, perhaps, in the title writer.

What became of Barrie's delicious comedy, *The Admirable Crichton*? What became of Mark Twain's satire, *The Connecticut Yankee*? What becomes of any work which, between covers, is essentially literary? Barrie's own opinion of what becomes of his work when put on the screen, is summed up by him neatly in his comment on the change made in the title of his play, *The Admirable Crichton*, to *Male and Female*. He said, with a chuckle up his sleeve, "I would have used it myself, if I had been capable of thinking it."

Too many elements are at work in a motion picture to render it thinkable as a one-man job. Any element prominent in the finished product, from photography to titles is important enough to modify it and give it flavor and feeling remote, if not contrary, to the original concept in the script.

Is not a motion picture the illustration of one form of art struggling through the medium of another, and an alien art? I mean, a motion picture is, let us say, primarily a drama; a drama muted. It is a play seeking expression through the medium of another art—photography. The writer who would aspire to the unique dignity of sole authorship of motion pictures would perforce be a versatile genius of such extensive gifts as never yet have been the endowment of any one man. The novelist thinks his story in terms of words, but the scenario writer does not, if he's worth the price they pay him. He thinks his story in terms of these images, which can not reach the screen through the genius of any one man. Even in the "small" details of casting I have seen a story, originally conceived in one spirit, come forth with an entirely different one, due merely to the exigencies of casting. A blonde, Nordic type was substituted for a heroine of the brunette, Mediterranean type, with the result that the entire story was flavored with a spirit foreign to the original idea. Every man who touches the picture in any of its important phases will add to it, automatically and unwittingly, something of himself, and this is true from the prop man up.

Exigencies of booking are also in the way of individualism in picture-making. A picture to be popular must address itself to a ready-made audience through the more or less accurate observations on audiences, made by exhibitors. Standardization then sets in and can not be ignored because a picture is not really a picture until it has been seen, any more than a sound is really a sound until it is heard.

Moving Pictures as a Symphonic Form

By LENORE J. COFFEE

THE symphony as a musical form offers a tremendous field of study to the men and women engaged in the creative and interpretive departments of moving pictures. There is a significant similarity between them; the composer represents the author, the musicians the actors and the conductor the director; perhaps we might even say the baton becomes the megaphone. Moving pictures are essentially a symphonic form in the welding of the creative work of the author, and the performances of the actors, which are both interpretive and creative, into a beautiful and harmonious whole under the hand of

the director. Just as no symphony can be greater than its conductor, so can no moving picture be greater than its director.

And the similarity goes even further. You could almost cast a picture, selecting your actors to correspond to the musical instruments; or rather to correspond to the note they contribute to the orchestration. The violins and cellos are your love motif, romance and pathos; the brasses and wood-winds are conflict and represent the more powerful structure; the flutes and clarinets, lightness and coquetry; and the instruments of percussion, such as tympani, cymbals, celesta, etc., supply the elements—rain and storm, sunshine and light. And the magnificent sweep and beauty of the full orchestra corresponds to the great climax of the picture.

Taking these same elements, we can determine what

"Si La Jeunesse Savait, Si La Vieillesse Pouvait!"

By LOWELL C. FROST

Youth Looks on Age:

I

The Old Man's losing out a bit, you say?
Oh, yes, he's getting slow—too old to put
The big scenes over swinging. But he knows
His stuff. Now, don't you fool yourself; he knows!
For instance take the other day: that scene
"The Mine's Mouth"—where the mother sees her son.
He's dying—suffocated—having saved
The superintendent's daughter. (A damned rotten,
Mushy scene, of course!) Well, the old lady,
She couldn't shed a tear or look a thing.
God knows I sweat a pint of blood; the scene
Dropped like a coil of lead pipe. Hell's bells!
I made her do it half-a-dozen times,
And showed her how, and gave her all I had:
No use! She couldn't seem to make it live.
Well,
The Old Man ambled up, took in the show . . .
He smiled. "Get ready," said he, quiet-like,
Gave Bill the high sign, said a few low words
To the old lady. I was standing by,
And I heard what he said:

"You had a baby . . .

Once? One night his small warm hands
Grew cold . . . and colder . . . 'till you were . . . alone.
This boy here is your baby . . . for to-night—
Go . . . look at him. Remember . . ."
She walked across the set where the boy lay:
My God! the look those words had put into
Her eyes!
That scene went over big.
Of course, the Old Man's losing all his pep. . . .
But . . . there's a lot he knows I'd give the world for!

II

Knowledge of men, knowledge of sky and earth—
How barren! And, far-reaching in my brain,
Thoughts, plans, desires, strive for birth
And find the power . . . lacking. Yet, in truth,
What should it profit me, what should I gain
Were I to sacrifice for the blind urge of youth,
Knowledge of men, knowledge of sky and earth?

the opening shall be; what note shall we strike? Shall we start with the strong brasses, representing the conflict of our story, and so suggest the nature of our climax? Or shall we begin with the delicate strains of the violins, establishing the love motif and romantic element? Or, again, shall we begin disarmingly with gaiety of the flutes deepening with sudden violence to the unexpected strength of the brasses with the piercing sweetness of the violins crying to be heard, and thus produce the most poignantly dramatic effect—the eternal conflict between love and violence, between delicacy and brute power? In a moving picture, as in a symphony, you have all the elements to work with and can strike what notes you please to begin with and to build to, but, in both forms, the **WHOLE** must be harmonious and related.

This affinity extends even to fundamental structure. A symphony falls into movements as a play does into acts and a moving picture into sequences:

The first movement of a symphony is the most intellectual movement—in a moving picture the beginning lays the foundation of the story, explains the characters and introduces the mental element.

The second movement of the symphony is the romantic or emotional movement—in a moving picture it is the development of the love story, enlisting the sympathy and emotions of the audience.

The third movement of a symphony is called the popular movement. Does this correspond, by any chance, to what we mean when we supply the element called "box-office"?

And then the Finale. In the early symphonies this was always jovial. In our own moving pictures which are still in an early form, is not this our somewhat inevitable "happy ending"? The analysis of the symphony further states that Beethoven, the great master of this form, broke away from the tradition of an unalterably jovial Finale and gave to it a broader and more ambitious character. This is surely what those masters among us are now trying to give to that critical portion of a moving picture—the Finale, or end.

I feel that so much more could be said, and said so much better, by someone who is really a musician, about the striking relationship between these two great forms—the symphony and the moving picture. Volumes could be written alone on the terrific importance of tempo to both mediums. A symphony played with largo in place of presto—allegretto in place of adagio—would be a hideous nightmare. The same thing occurs in a moving picture when a scene or sequence is directed in the wrong tempo.

I hope it is a little significant that the great symphony concerts for the people held in the Hollywood Bowl should have reached such fine development here in the heart of moving pictures which, in their ideal state, should be great symphonies of beauty and form and movement.

Yesterday, To-day and To-morrow

By DOROTHY HARRISON

Secretary to The Spectator Editor

GOING back in thought to the old days in pictures and comparing them with the pictures of the present day, what do we find? Improvements made by money, such as lavishness in production, but how about

the artistic side of the question? Compare some of the super-productions of ten years ago, for instance, with the super-production of to-day and you will find that the artistic development has not been proportionate with the passage of time. Photography and screen architecture have moved forward a very long way, for the reason that the men who are engaged in those crafts think primarily of their work and its advancement, and secondarily of themselves, and like all pioneers, they penetrate further and further and build and beautify until the results of their research and toil are beginning to make themselves apparent.

The photographer and the technician find far more freedom in their work than do the writers, directors and actors, because their work, being highly specialized in a different way and requiring as it does intricate mechanical knowledge, does not brook the same interference. But the people who prepare the stories, direct and act in them are so largely ordered by minds that are trained to a certain point (which is not quite far enough), that they simply do not have a chance to do themselves justice. Studio heads are largely responsible for this state among the first two of this group, but in the case of the actors the blame is divided between the studio heads and the public.

Unfortunately, a great many people do not realize the extent of the public's sin. Think of some of our most famous stars of ten years ago. What are they doing now? Either the same thing—by force—or else they are choked to death in the effort to struggle ahead to something of which they know themselves to be capable, but which their public refuses to accept because they are not running "true to type". "Type" is a word which has become the curse of the industry and, even now, is holding down several of our finest actors. A few have managed to break the yoke and struggle free, like Gloria Swanson, Dorothy Gish, Richard Dix and Syd Chaplin, to name a small percentage, while others have either become disheartened and left the screen, been thrust further down the scale or taken up other lines of work altogether.

In condemnation of the public, consider the case of Mary Pickford, one of the world's greatest dramatic actresses, who is forced to go on playing child parts when she has the power to stir the world as it seldom has been stirred—if only her public would let her. Twice she has tried to pave the way to the heights she can scale so easily, but the public has set its face solidly against her and said, in effect, "No, she must be a child always. We will not help her to do what she wants to do and feels she can do; she must please us if she breaks her heart doing so!"

Then there are other people who are obliged to run always along the same road, like Louise Dresser and Belle Bennett. Because Miss Dresser made *The Goose Woman* and Miss Bennett *Stella Dallas*, they have to repeat those characterizations over and over again. Think of Miss Dresser in the sequence of *The Goose Woman* when she reverts to the opera singer, and then magnify that into a part running through an entire picture, without any drabness. Why shouldn't she be allowed to do it?

At the present time we have another great actress sojourning in our midst—Lucille La Verne. Think back to her work in *Orphans of the Storm* and other pictures. Yet the producers will probably let her finish her run of

Sun Up and succumb once more to the blandishments of London for another two years' run before they realize that she was here and that it is too late. And so on. The cases are too numerous to mention.

But let us hope that in the future, to the three unities of time, place and action, will be added a fourth—unity of purpose, with entire co-operation between the industry and the public. In that way, with everybody working for its highest aims, the screen can become the greatest art the world ever has known.

Silk Purses and Sow's Ears!

By PAUL SCHOFIELD

"A PROPHEET is not without honor, save in his own country."

The status of the original story, written directly for the screen by a photoplaywright of admitted experience and accomplishment, proves it.

WHY—do producers pay a huge sum for a title, a famous novel or a Broadway play, whether a success or not; ask a scenario writer in whom they have confidence and whom they pay from ten to twenty thousand dollars to "adapt" it, which means writing from half to an entire original story; invent business; create means of characterization; insert "comedy relief"; in other words, make a silk purse out of a sow's ear; and then refuse to give serious consideration to an original story written by the same photoplaywright?

WHY—when they do condescend to consider such a story, tailored to order for a director or a star by a writer who knows his business, do they grudgingly offer him from ten to twenty-five per cent. for his silk purse what they are willing and eager to pay him for his work on the sow's ear?

WHY—do producers and supervisors piously murmur that the future of the screen lies in the development of photoplaywrights who can furnish the same originality and skill that creates the great stage successes—and then either refuse to consider or offer a ridiculous price for the work of photoplaywrights already developed and acknowledged craftsmen?

WHY—I ask these solemn gentlemen, should such trained writers gamble time for which these producers and supervisors are willing to pay a great deal of money, in the heart-breaking speculation of writing original material for the screen, only to see their work overlooked or underpaid? The answer is that they should not and do not—and will not, until producers reward the creation of such material sufficiently generously to stimulate its creation.

WHY—should not the men who, good business men though they are, know nothing of stories, set themselves as a sullen barrier against the presentation on the screen of original material created expressly for the screen by men who know story construction and dramatic values? Let me ask them how many of the great stage successes listed in Mr. Mantle's "Best Plays", from 1919 to 1926, have been "adapted"? Do they know?

WHY—do men titularly credited with "Super Vision" not realize that the alteration and emasculation of a novel which has run into sales of millions of copies, and its altered presentation on the screen, arouse only resentment and disappointment in the minds of the millions

familiar with the story—create derision of the business we all wish to command respect? One reason Beau Geste was universally acclaimed was because it was transcribed to the screen with absolute fidelity to the book with which millions were familiar; they were not disappointed, nor were they irritated. Having loved the novel—they were not permitted to deny the picture! But while Seventh Heavens and Beau Geste are in themselves silk purses, asking any harrassed scenario editor or supervisor, feverishly hunting for material, how many of them there are available!

Filet is tenderloin—but tripe is tripe; and to buy tripe, "adapt" it and force it down the public throat is to make the public sore. And if the producer is fortunate enough to command the services of a scenario writer clever enough to "adapt" tripe into a dish that can pass even as flank steak—he should encourage that photoplaywright to give him some original material.

There is more money thrown away—and more colossal ignorance displayed in the acquisition and preparation of material for the screen than in any other one department of the business. The men in this business who know stories; who know dramatic construction and characterization; who are capable of furnishing, either from their own brains or by selection of good material, the silk purses that the business needs, are too busy trying to "adapt" sow's ears purchased by thirty-five dollar a week readers, after the approval of two hundred thousand dollar a year producers and supervisors. If the writer of this article, or any other writer in Hollywood, had submitted to certain producers in the picture business original manuscripts of *Variety* or *The Last Laugh*, he would have been strictured for wasting their valuable time and imposing on his acquaintance with them.

Some day, like the stage, the screen is going to have to rely upon material written expressly for it by writers of reputation as photoplaywrights, for the bulk of its entertainment. And like almost all real reforms, it will have to come of necessity, and not from any disposition on the part of present motion picture executives to bring it about.

Lend Me Thy Best Ear, Oh, Beaton!

By TOM REED

WHEN Welford Beaton asked me to compile some bright sayings for *The Spectator* I was pleased.

But when he mentioned in a note that I might take issue with him about something or other, so that a better article would be forthcoming, I was alarmed. "Remember," I counseled myself, "as editor of the paper, the protagonist of the comma and the period always has the last word and I had best be careful or have a measure of dashes and exclamation points shied at my beetling brow." But then I thought of a simple way out. I decided to write a sentence to this effect, "If Welford replies to my effort all bets are off. The article is null and void and I was only fooling." So if you see a paragraph in rebuttal, realize that I, a healthy male, have been taken advantage of. And in this day and age you can't do that.

Welford has a vote of thanks coming to him. He has awakened the producers. Now they look twice at screen titles, examine them closely for mistakes, and pass them

fearfully. They dislike the raps of the editors who now follow the lead of the Beaton.

But Welford is wrong. (My typewriter trembles.) He has taken too much on his shoulders. It is true that the elementary rules of punctuation should be followed rigidly. But after they are observed, it is up to the titler to lay stress as he sees fit. Examine Balzac and then read Hugo. To hop to the other edge of the world, peruse Laotze. Where, pray tell me, do you find set rules for punctuation? Drama or comedy is emphasized as the author wills. On the screen the dash is a godsend. (Once again, I shake in my Innes slippers.) When twenty words are put into an opening title, a dash or two spaces them so that every reader may get the writer's thought more easily. You'll find strings of periods in Anatole France. And dashes—you'll find them accentuating points in everything that James Branch Cabell ever wrote, and many regard him as a great stylist. Take my title which opens Conrad Veidt's first American starring picture, *A Man's Past*, which I titled for Universal:

Mont Noir — — bleak mountain island! They say when the sun goes down, its black shadow may still be seen far out on the Mediterranean.

The dashes after the name of the island make the audience pause just long enough. And a pause is important, for later on the name "Mont Noir" is extremely significant. A comma, instead of the dashes, would not give the tempo I strove for. Dashes are primarily parenthetical, but they do give the eye a chance on the screen. They should mark a suspension of the sense, a faltering in speech, a change of construction, or a turn of thought. And one must give the mind a chance to follow the thought, mustn't one?

Enough of that. Now to the wisecrack. In the event that some producer or director shoots first in the next year so so, never let it be said that this screen title writer ever employed the typical wisecrack. To my esteemed colleague, Walter Anthony, must go the credit for calling to my attention the menace of the common laugh of the moment. To-day the "you can't do that's" and the "why did you bring that up's" are being thrown into comedy spots in every studio in the industry. The other evening I caught a title at a local theatre which read something like this: "I got them in a little Spanish town. 'Twas on a night like this." Stony silence welcomed the caption. It might as well have read, "every day in every way." Why don't the directors realize that real humor never dies? Gags are but flashes in the pan. "Two Black Crow" laughs will soon be relegated to the limbo of "Yes, we have no bananas."

Take up a volume of "Innocents Abroad" and between the dashes, laugh at the humor of America's greatest writer, Mark Twain, the man who unofficially conquered the world for America. Realize in his "Following the Equator" or "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" that the humor which pleases you was written some time ago, before the age of the wisecrack. Real humor is whimsical—sometimes pointed. And the picture producers can't have their current releases re-titled every few months, can they? The answer is simple. William A. Seiter, a perspicacious director if there ever was one, has the right idea. When I undertook the titling of *Out All Night*, a Reginald Denny starring vehicle, he looked me square in the eye and threatened instant annihilation should I prepare a topical wheeze. The result (if I do chortle so

myself) was pleasing. No time-worn gags, but humor which was guaranteed not to rip, tear, rust or shrink. And which, furthermore, will be pleasing as long as Universal cares to exhibit the picture.

And now, Welford Beaton, do your worst. Realize that the dash has not recently been adopted by ye penman. Go on, have your old vacation, and as soon as you are rested dash back to us, for, dash my eye, the screen is at a period when it needs a guy with plenty of dash — like you.

The Big Idea

By HENRY IRVING DODGE

Author of several well known books.

I AM convinced that the writer man is the most important factor in the motion picture industry to-day—provided he have an idea back of his story.

George M. Cohan, the shrewdest play producer in America, once told me: "It doesn't matter how much you make your audience laugh and applaud, if you don't give them something to talk about when the show's over or at the breakfast table next morning, your play's a failure."

A good story is apt to mean good box-office receipts.

A good story plus an idea is sure to mean big box-office receipts.

For by your worth-while story you intrigue, hold the interest; by your big idea you make people talk—and it's talk, and talk alone, that sends people to the show.

No matter how much paid advertising or free publicity you put into the exploitation of your picture or play, unless you get people to talk about it it's a failure. For, remember, talk is the most effective free publicity known.

Also I have found that a big idea back of one's story will facilitate, if it does not actually produce, a vast deal of printer's ink publicity. Reporters, editors and paragraphists all love to dilate upon a big idea. They may approve or disagree or even poke fun at your idea. But the great thing is, they write about it. And that again promotes talk and talk manifests itself in your box-office. It's inevitable.

And so I have made it a point always to have an idea back of every story that I write. In *Skinner's Dress Suit*, *Skinner's Big Idea*, *Skinner Makes It Fashionable*, *The Yellow Dog*, and *The Thirteenth Juror*—which Universal has just produced—I wrote as good a story as I was capable of concocting, and always based it on what I believed to be a big idea.

In writing *Skinner's Dress Suit* I selected an intriguing theme—the relation of good appearance to prosperity. Everybody wants to be successful—and there you are.

Skinner's Big Idea was based on the absurd practice prevalent of dismissing men of middle-age, at the highest point of their efficiency, simply because they were nearing the fifty line. *Skinner Makes It Fashionable* showed how to reduce the high cost of living and at the same time promote health and beauty. *The Thirteenth Juror* is an argument against circumstantial evidence.

But it was essential, in each case, that the story in itself be gripping. And I've always found it easier to write a story based on an idea than a mere plot story. The reason is obvious. A most valuable quality in a story, I have found, more gripping even than the element of love, is the element of the weird.

There are many directors who seem to think that there must be constant physical movement on the screen to produce the desired effect, such as running up and down stairs or drawing an automatic or fist-fighting or safe-breaking, on every possible occasion. Movement will quite notoriously attract a small chicken—I don't mean in the slang sense. The little creature will follow anything that moves, which is why any old, motherly duck may so easily adopt it.

But how much more effective it is to hold a good situation without movement. The great Salvini used, at times, to hold his audience in the most intense grip, using his eyes alone—no speech, no movement of the body—and for inconceivable periods.

Edward Laemmle, who directed *The Thirteenth Juror*, showed rare grasp and appreciation in so directing Francis X. Bushman that that actor held one scene for several hundred feet of film by suggestive facial work alone. During this scene the audience actually sat on the edge of its seats, so gripped and held was it. Laemmle visualized the situation just as I had visualized it when I wrote the story.

I never could understand why, when a story is in itself a logical, an inevitable succession of gripping scenes and situations, it should not be put on the screen as the author has conceived it. Why throw in extraneous things which only divert attention and weaken the grip of your plot on your audience; or by reversing the order of, or leaving out, absolutely relevant circumstances, throw the whole thing out of gear?

I have seen very many pictures—I am an indefatigable "fan"—that might have been improved a hundred per cent. if the writer had been consulted about the scenario. He could have picked out a lot of glaring defects, and filled up or bridged a lot of plot-holes—and plot-holes are often fatal.

I have observed that to-day many film-tired persons resent things in the pictures—inconsistencies—that they don't understand. They are puzzled by their very existence and are often offended and resentful.

Some time ago Mr. Griffith urged writer-men to master the technic of the screen, commenting that this was a new medium of expression. For that matter, so is the radio a new medium of expression. The old troubadours had a medium all their own.

But it doesn't matter how many mediums there are, the basic principle of story telling underlies them all. And that principle is: intrigue, intrigue, intrigue—keep on intriguing from beginning to end. And, so far as I know, the writer-man is the only master of that art. It's his trade, his business.

Griffith would more profitably urge his adaptors, scenarists and directors to learn the fundamentals of story telling. That's the most vital need of pictures to-day.

Human Characterizations

By BENJAMIN S. KUTLER

THE story telling aspects of motion pictures to-day are rapidly approaching the era of humanity. Stories containing delicately drawn human characters are proving more and more each day to be the nucleus around which prosperous studios producing successful pictures are revolving.

In the long ago, which is after all but very recently as the past ages of picture-making are counted, the plot, and in reality the many complex and interwoven plots within plots, were the sole things that counted. It was a well known fact in those days, that if one in the audience stopped to bat an eyelash, he would necessarily miss one of the many cruxes or some one of the great many anticlimaxes. To carefully build any character in an endeavor to make that character seem real and human was entirely out of the question. The producers' cry forever was, "Plots . . . plots! . . . plots!! . . . more plots!!!"

No one seemed to realize that simple human tales into which were woven the various vicissitudes that some one character or characters experienced would produce finished screen material of great entertainment value. To even mention such productions as having box-office value and appeal seemed insane.

For years I have championed the idea of human characterizations and always contended that plentifully buried within such thoughts were many ideas for stories, the names of which would become household words of familiar allusion, and the box-office results of which would astound the most skeptical.

Granted that the story and scenario are entirely acceptable, there is no denying the fact, however, that to produce such stories one great and pressing need lies in procuring very capable character actors and actresses as well as directors.

Only recently we have had come to us such sterling productions as *Alias the Deacon*, *The Last Laugh*, *Mr. Wu*, *His People*, and *The Way of All Flesh*. Instantly a mental association is formed between the above productions and

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the following peerless character stars: Jean Hersholt, Emil Jannings, Lon Chaney, and Rudolph Schildkraut.

In my last story, the working title of which is **The Braggart**, soon to be produced by Universal starring Jean Hersholt, I have endeavored not to sacrifice plot entirely at the expense of human characterization, or vice versa. While the producers found this particular plot quite acceptable, it gave me great personal satisfaction to note the fact that they realized the plot itself became greatly enhanced because the paramount person in the story was characterized humanly and that only if his mode of living, habits and past life were shown as befitting him, then, and in that event only, would the future sequences of his life in the story upon the screen be entirely acceptable to any audience. Fortunately, for the concern and success of this particular production, it will serve as a starring vehicle for Jean Hersholt, who will be directed by Ted Sloman.

I venture to say that if scenarios containing the stories of *The Last Laugh* or *The Way of All Flesh* had been submitted to producers only a short while ago, the writers of such tales would have been laughed at and such authors would have been quite at a loss to answer the screaming producers' "Where is the plot?"

Some of our greatest literary masters such as Poe, Zola, Balzac, Stevenson and others, have given to the world at times little gems that were real and human and utterly devoid of all such plot and counter-plot, and we know that such stories exist.

But we are learning and quickly approaching the stage when true, real and human drawing of any and all of the various characters in our stories will be considered of the utmost importance in the field of the coming motion picture.

In the future when we speak of plot in a scenario, we shall not as a rule refer to some of the more complex plots. A story having but little plot, but being really human, and surrounded with expertly drawn characterizations, will not mean that the story lacks strength. A simple plot may be very strong as, for instance, in *Enoch Arden*. It may be said, in passing, that the highest art in the treatment of a story is that which presents its fullest possibilities in the simplest ways. Story telling, like architecture, is essentially structural, and nothing is more structural than the art of characterization. The story teller or the architect who departs from the structural idea is going the way that will eventually lead to error and oblivion.

Intricacy of plot will not be entirely sought after or greatly desired very soon. Finely drawn characterizations certainly do involve the elements of curiosity, suspense, surprise and all the other varying phases necessary to make up the continuity and tensivity of interest of human existence.

Nearly everyone, I imagine, can write intricate-plot scenarios. But in character drawing, another sort of mental equipment is needed.

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When the motion picture made its debut in the entertainment field, scenario writing came to us just like spontaneous combustion; it "just happened". But under modern conditions it is both a science and an art. Other things being equal, the most successful scenario writers of the future will be the ones who devote themselves most assiduously to the art of human characterizations. And that art is rather difficult.

But there is an old Latin proverb which is very good for us all: "Laborando Proficies." It means, "By laboring you become proficient," or more simply, "Work tells."

This Marco and Hellman Stuff

By K. C. B.

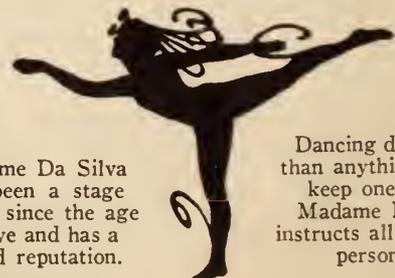
I DON'T know if it is within the province of one who is asked to contribute to the "Contributors' Number" of *The Spectator* to air one's views on the presentation of picture theatre programs, but inasmuch as I don't know anything about the making of pictures, but do know a whole lot about what I like when I go to a picture show, I'm going to take a chance and say whatever I want to say.

Why is it then, when there is a picture I want to see and it is playing at a big house, and if I don't get there just at the moment the picture begins, that, in order to see it, I must sit through a period of antics by some orchestra leader, and in some of the houses be compelled also to sit through these Marco and Hellman or somebody and Marco or Marco and somebody, prologues or epilogues or whatever they are?

And then, in order to give all of this extra show, and to make a turn over every two hours or whatever it is, they take the news reel, which in my opinion is one of the greatest picture show attractions, and cut it down to almost nothing at all!

There are four in our family and we are pretty consistent motion picture goers. Three of us are most positive in our unwillingness to sit through these Marco and Hellman things. The other doesn't mind it so much if there's a good picture. And we all of us know the houses where they run the news reel in what I assume is its complete form. And these are all little houses, neighborhood houses. Therefore, when we have agreed that we are going to a picture show we find the Hollywood Citizen and choose the picture we want to see and go and see it. Sometimes we have to wait through many weeks for the big pictures to come, but they finally get to us.

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If I had some money I was willing to risk—for I'll agree it might be a risk—I would build myself a comfortable little theatre, open it along about noon every day, charge a straight twenty-five cents admission, get all the news reel stuff I could get, the best two-reel comedies I could buy, and whatever short features there are in the market, or what have you, for a man or woman who doesn't want to be bored, and run one show every hour until closing time.

If there were such a theatre within reasonable distance of my home there would not be a week in which they wouldn't get a dollar from me. And I can imagine that no end of persons, in addition to those who would attend only such a theatre as I have described, would drop into my theatre before or after seeing a performance at another theatre. One thing I do know, and that is that there are many thousands of us in every community to whom the news reel has a great appeal.

However, I don't want anyone to get the idea that I don't know there are lots of persons who like these Marco and Hellman things, and the dancing and singing orchestra leaders. Even I, who am hollering my head off about them, would stand for 'most anything to hear Eddie Peabody play his banjo. I'd even say I liked his clothes. But Eddie is a rarity. And I don't say that these prologues, or epilogues, or whatever they are, aren't well done. Of my own knowledge I know that some of them are. But when I go to a motion picture theatre, I go to see motion pictures, and I don't want that things I like shall be sacrificed to permit a leaping leader to leap or a lot of girls to stand around on movable scenery.

And now, with this opportunity that has been given me to air my views to the readers of The Spectator, I want to ask if somebody won't go out and find a good, sensible looking girl—or anyway, a sensible looking girl—who isn't pretty or isn't ugly, but just a plain, ordinary girl, like most of our sisters and daughters, a girl whose face expresses possession of intelligence instead of being just beautiful. And then I'd ask that they make of her a star, so that when she said brilliant or clever things, or did brilliant or clever things, I could believe her, something I am so often unable to do with most of our dumb but beautiful stars. I don't mean to say that all of our stars are dumb, because I know they're not, but when they are selected primarily for their beauty it must follow that the dumb ones get in along with the bright ones.

I have no idea what amount of copy the editor of The Spectator wants from me. Not knowing anything about the making of pictures and never having tried to run a picture theatre, I don't know much about them and so could go on writing for an indefinite period. It's so easy to just go rambling on, not caring whether it makes sense or not and knowing that those who agree with me will say, "yah," and those who don't will say "apple-sauce."

Oh, yes! I'd almost forgotten that once on a time, a few years ago, I did lend my services to the making of motion pictures. I titled several. I like to brag about the fact that I cut and titled the government's great war pictures, America's Answer, and Under Four Flags. I likewise titled several other pictures, of studio manufacture. I quit when a young man of swarthy countenance who said "I seen" and "you done it", started to argue with me about some of the titles I had written. And inasmuch as

THIS IS GOOD

IT HAS been with keen interest that I read the "Warning" given to The Film Spectator readers against paying any attention to the Runyadha, Ltd., articles.

Paradoxically I agree with most of what was contained in the "Warning".

As they said I have "*Not the nerve to come out and say anything which an insurance representative can contradict.*"

That is true. I not only have not the nerve, but I have no desire, and I am glad that they admit, even if it was unintentional, that an insurance representative can not contradict anything I have said.

In my last article I said, "Prove that Life Insurance as an investment is the bunk, and you are a TWISTER." Well, the "Warning" admits this. Nevertheless, Life Insurance as an investment is the bunk.

Lest, however, there might be any doubt in the minds of my readers, I would like to say that the term "Twisting" is defined by the law of June the 7th, 1915; Stats. 1915 p. 1272, as follows in part:

"No insurance company, association, or society, officer, director, agent, solicitor or broker, or any person, firm, association or corporation shall make any misrepresentation, oral, written or otherwise, to any person for the purpose of inducing or tending to induce such person to take out a policy of insurance, or for the purpose of inducing or tending to induce a policyholder in any company to lapse, forfeit or surrender his insurance therein, or to refuse to accept a policy issued upon an application therefor, and to take out a policy of insurance in any other company."

The violation of the above law is subject to a penalty of six months in prison, and I want to announce publicly now, *that if any insurance company will prosecute me for the violation of this law, I will pay the expenses win or lose.*

To this I want to add just one more statement, that there is hardly a policy written, sold, or issued to-day by any insurance company that is not in violation of this law, and that practically every policy is misleading, and in its general tenor misrepresentative of the actual facts; and it should long since have been made impossible for the companies to advertise, sell or accept money for the payment of 99% of the policies now being carried by the intelligent (?) American public, who are either too lazy to inquire, or to stupid to find out for themselves where the bunk is, and every policy combining investment with insurance is merely bunk, as shown in the previous article under the title of "No Wonder the Horses Laugh."

This is my answer to the companies' "Warning". Now if they mean what they say, let them prosecute me.

I again repeat what was said in all previous articles.

Particularly, everybody can get back 25% and up of what they have paid for their insurance, and reduce the future cost proportionately.

I have no insurance to sell. It costs nothing to find out the truth of what I say, and I will be glad to answer in the future as I have done in the past, any inquiries addressed c/o The Film Spectator.

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he had a regular job, and I was getting just so much a title, I figured the best thing I could do was to ask for my hat. It was a straw hat and only the middle of May. Perhaps I acted unwisely, because the young man is now far advanced in the motion picture business. He seen it was a good thing and he stayed with it while I done a Nazimova and walked out. But here I am, chattering along about myself, and it's a warm afternoon and I don't get any pay for this and why should I go on and on?

P. S.—I've just remembered. It's Fanchon and Marco, not Marco and Hellman.

The Guild and the Producers

By GRANT CARPENTER

President of the Screen Writers' Guild of the Authors' League of America

THE Screen Writers' Guild of the Authors' League of America has requested the Association of Motion Picture Producers to negotiate such equitable standard contracts for staff and free lance writers as may be deemed satisfactory by both writers and producers. The need is so evident and the request so reasonable that the Writers' Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has added its request to that of the Guild. If the producers had ever taken the trouble to investigate the purposes of the Guild and the effect of equitable contracts upon motion picture production the request would have come from the producers.

The producers, without the slightest reason beyond the suspicion and distrust with which employers usually view any organization of employees, have regarded the Guild as some sort of a labor union, hostile in intent and predatory in character. Its purposes as defined by its Constitution are: To procure adequate copyright legislation for the protection of literary compositions; to combat censorship; to protect the rights and property of its members and to promote their interests and welfare by procuring a greater measure of cooperation between its members and producers to insure equitable and sympathetic treatment and consideration; by procuring for writers adequate credit; by helping its members to secure adequate compensation and recognition, and by establishing and enforcing a code of professional ethics.

If its Constitution had been dictated by a thoughtful and conscientious producer it is inconceivable that it would have been framed otherwise. And in the six years of its existence no producer can point to a single instance in which it has departed in the slightest degree from its avowed purposes. It could not do so without coming into direct conflict with its parent organization, the Authors' League of America, and sacrificing its position as one of the component parts of the most influential literary organization in the whole world to-day. Any activity not in strict conformity with its declared policy and purposes would inevitably generate the germs of its own destruction.

The only clause in the Guild's Constitution that might be viewed with suspicion by a producer is that relating to adequate compensation and recognition. That can not possibly mean price fixing, for the salaries of writers range from \$100 to \$3,000 a week, and the price of continuities from \$300 to \$25,000; and any attempt to equalize or regulate the wage scale or classify writers would

instantly disrupt the organization. It means exactly what it says—adequate compensation and recognition for services rendered. It was designed to protect the writer against trick contracts under which he might be compelled to lie idle for months without pay.

Nor does the clause threaten an attempt to increase compensation by imposing a closed shop on the producer. The writer harbors no fears of competition. He knows that able writers have always been and always will be too few, and that fear of competition is a confession of incompetency. The efforts of the Guild to draw all screen writers into its organization are prompted by the purposes expressed in its Constitution, feeling assured that the fulfillment of those purposes will benefit the industry generally and work injury to none. Unethical practices by any writer reflect upon the craft as a whole, and there

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is no method of checking them except by bringing all of the writers within the control of its regulations.

There are no differences between the producer and the writer not attributable solely to lack of understanding. The producer wants able and conscientious writers and is willing to pay the price they demand. The writer is eager for an opportunity to produce the best possible work and enhance the demand for his services. But, under existing conditions, the producer can not possibly gauge the capabilities of writers, and the writer finds it equally impossible to demonstrate his ability. This condition is due solely to studio system, or the lack of it. Duties and responsibilities are not clearly defined, but constantly overlap and conflict. The writer is compelled to guess and to grope for what the producer or supervisor has in mind but can not express, or to follow orders which his professional training tells him instantly are absurd. Added to his difficulties are the mental hazards under which he constantly labors—the trick contract that may deprive him of adequate compensation and the buck-passing, by which he may be robbed of credit if the picture be good, and visited with censure if it be bad.

Many of the best writers of the world have been brought to Hollywood to write for the screen, and the fact that, almost without exception, they have failed miserably proves conclusively, not that they can not write, but that no one can write under the conditions imposed. That some few, after years of experience, have been able to break through and distinguish themselves may be attributed to a combination of ability and fortuitous circumstances. Standard contracts designed to protect the writer against the destructive system in vogue will inevitably reform these conditions and give the writer the chance to which he is entitled.

Picture production is a complex art in which those of the different crafts have their proper place. Controversy as to their relative importance is futile. Writers should be permitted to write their scripts without the interference of directors, and directors should be permitted to direct their stories without the interference of writers. When the personal equation enters into the problem one who is competent to write and direct his own stories should be allowed to do it. What is needed is more of intelligent cooperation and less of ignorant authority.

It's Possible

By TOM MIRANDA

A LOT is being said and much is being written about who is at fault over the high cost of making moving pictures. Everyone is blaming the poor producer. They say all manner of things about him. He is ignorant, egotistical, unapproachable, carried away by his own importance, all of which is a lot of bunk. If anything, he is just the opposite.

During my twelve years in pictures, I have met very few producers who were not only willing, but eager to accept and follow intelligent suggestions in the matter of making pictures. If they were ignorant in the beginning (and who of us were not?) they have been the quickest to learn. Many of the great forward strides made by pictures in the past five years are due to the genius of the producer, or to his aid and fearless co-operation. At best his end of the game is a gamble. He surrounds him-

self with what he believes to be the most capable and efficient organization, pays them considerably more than they could secure in any other profession or business, and if he doesn't get results, why should he kick up a fuss?

The one big fault with the producers right now is over-organization. Too many advisers. As one producer recently said in answer to my question: "How are the pictures coming?" "Miranda, I don't know. I guess the real trouble with us is too much organization. I used to think that we made pretty good, and sometimes extra good pictures, and that I had ideas worth considering. But with all of our great supply of brains, we have a helluva time getting anywhere. I think we're over-misadvised."

Just as "Too many cooks spoil the broth", so will too many advisers spoil a picture.

Over-organization creates jealousies. Everyone wants a finger in the pie, and at the expense of all other fingers. The result is what the producer gets. John Smith's idea may have been masterful, the basis for a great picture, but if it brings no credit to Sam Brown, Eddie Jones, or Howard Sinclair, do you think it will ever reach the light? Perhaps, but John Smith will never get credit for it.

Then again we hear a lot about "creative work" and how it must be handled. "You can't drive imagination!" More bunk! The best work ever produced on the screen has been the brain child of some poor slave who was being driven by the well known little devil "overhead". "We must start shooting Monday", has created more big things in pictures than all the dreamy easy-chairs ever made.

Building a theatre is also creative work. Yet we don't see the contractor running around taking advice from a half dozen decorators, a half dozen carpenters, a half

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dozen architects, or a half dozen plumbers. Not much! He picks out the one best fitted for a particular job and he contracts with him to do that job according to plans and specifications. But once he picks his man, he relies on that man's judgment to finish the job. And in most cases the job stands. Naturally, it is not always 100% perfect, but in the completed product, or building, it stands for what it is, and he is paid off as agreed. Since building a theatre is creative work, wherein does it greatly differ from making a motion picture?

Some day, some one is going to tackle the job of making pictures in the same manner that S. M. Cooper or some other well known builder tackles the job of building houses. There will be a John Brown Organization that will take your story and their story architect will draw up a set of plans (continuity) for making it into a motion picture at a certain price, and accompanying this continuity will be a complete set of plans of every set to be used in the picture. The producer will see at a glance what his picture will cost and what it should be when completed, and he will know from the reputation of the John Brown Organization that it will be as near perfection as it is possible to produce it.

Mr. John Brown, picture contractor, will also suggest a cast for the picture (the cost of which will, of course, be included in his bid for making the picture). If the cast is not what the producer wants, and he has not suggested a cast at the outset, changes can be made as changes in decorations on a building contract are made. If John Brown agrees to finish the picture for \$100,000 satisfactorily and according to specifications O. K.'d by the producer, and the cost of producing it should be considerably more, then it will not be the producer's loss, but the contractor's.

This may sound like a far cry from the present system of production, but it is very possible and almost certain to come. Most certainly if there are great organizations that can turn out such creative works as Grauman's Chinese Theatre to Mr. Grauman's satisfaction, then there can be great picture-producing organizations that can contract to, and produce a certain story into a picture at a certain price, or on a cost-plus basis, with satisfaction to the man who furnishes the money. But they will be organizations of highly specialized brains. There will be no four-flushers drawing pay for decorating an arm chair and looking wise. Each member of the organization will be selected because of his expert ability as an artist in his especial line of endeavor.

It's bound to come, and it will be the outgrowth of economy and the producer's aim for better pictures. But it will not come so long as the producers are over-advised, or as my producer friend called it: "over-misadvised". For, until the producer learns to have confidence in the man he selects for a certain task, and allows him to carry out his own ideas alone, he will never see the great opportunity for economical production through the contractor's plan, or the director's cost-plus plan. His over-advisers won't let him see it. It means the end of their jobs.

We are nearing the age of the free lance artist, when only men of ability, who can produce results all of the time, will stand the gaff. Men whose work will place them in demand and whose ability, already proven, will be the stamp of quality by which the John Brown Organization will be known.

The Writer and the Motion Pictures

By MADELEINE MATZEN

THE other day I met and talked with a group of young and struggling writers. A poet, a man who had written an only mildly successful play, a newspaper woman, etc. Somebody had made pounds of fudge, there were sandwiches and home made wine and cake—so everyone was invited. You know how it is when writers "get together"—you've heard the racket of talk at The Writers' Club!

There was much talk and it dealt mostly with the difficulty that the new writer encounters in storming the studio gate.

The playwright was holding forth:

"I've had lots of chances to write for the screen!" he said. "Strange opportunities at mediocre salaries to write with certain of the highest paid continuity and scenario writers. Positions in which I was to give any ideas that I had in the way of plots, action and characterization—in short I was to inject fresh and new interest into their work and receive no credit on the screen or in the industry for it. It was work 'under cover' and the result, it was hoped, would add lustre to the names of those who were paying me. I was not to be on the studio payroll—these writers would pay me out of their own pockets. If anyone questioned me I was to pose as "their secretary"!"

"Most of the BIG writers in the industry are written out. The reason for this is doubtless due to the fact that

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they are lost in a rut of policy and technique, or perhaps they have so little to write of that after a few years they just naturally cease to function. Many of the so called 'BIG' writers are thriving and forging ahead on the brains of young and unknown writers of whom you never heard."

"Writing poetry doesn't keep the wolf from the door," interrupted the poet, "so I work all day in a cutting room at one of the big studios. The waste of work and time and money that is swept up each day from the cutting room floor appals me! Hundreds of families could live a whole year on the waste that is shown on the film which is thrown away. When a director is handed the job of doing a big picture, the first thing he does is to lose his head, acquire a delusion of grandeur, and the sinful waste begins.

"I come in contact with the highest paid continuity and title writers when they drift into the cutting room to oversee the work. Most of them are given to misuse of the English language, they say things like 'me and her', 'we wuz', etc. They are the 'dese, dem and doze' boys of the industry," he concluded.

I looked my unbelief—but a girl who cuts film at a different studio insisted that it was true. The poet is a university graduate, a fact which he dare not mention in the cutting room—it would cost him his job, he told me, for it would make the "dese, dem and doze" boys nervous.

"I hear that Poverty Row will give the unknown writer a chance!" began the newspaper woman. "There is precious little waste on their cutting room floors! But what chance have they against the big fellows? Someone spread the polite rumor that stories are stolen along The Row but I have yet to hear of a real case of a stolen story on Poverty Row. But every so often the big companies are being sued for plagiarizing a story. At the big studio they seem to absorb any new ideas that are floating about—they don't call it stealing—they call it 'using every means to make the screenplay a success'.

"Those who have arrived by writing for the 'movies' have formed a pretty tight ring to keep out the newcomer. They yell in protest if you accuse them of it, but the old names continue to turn out rotten pictures and draw down exorbitant salaries. There is no such thing as logic in a studio—there are only politics, and pull. It is the most unsound, the shakiest business in the world—and the scandal lies in the fact that it is one of our chief industries.

"Our paper is planning a series of 'pogroms' intended to kill off unnecessary duds in the way of overpaid names that are littering up the various picture corporations. It will be a wholesale slaughter—believe me!" she laughed, and added, "But it may clear out a space for the newcomers!"

As I listened to the talk I saw the handwriting on the wall. The day of changes in the industry is at hand. A revolution is brewing down below, far below the seats of the mighty producers. It need not be a bloody revolution, there will be no strikes, but the producers themselves have played their last cards and I believe the day of the NEW producers is at hand. The day of men who will give us photoplay after photoplay as big in every sense as The Last Laugh, The Big Parade, and Sunrise. Great pictures should not be made by accident, they should be made deliberately, and there have been far too many long and boresome gaps between big pictures.

Those who have invested their money in picture making are beginning to grumble. Stories of waste and favoritism have reached their ears. SOMETHING HAS GOT TO HAPPEN! Things can't grow much worse—the average output of pictures couldn't be poorer so it is natural that the future must be brighter.

No, I am not a Bolshevik! I believe in the aristocrat! But there are precious few aristocrats sitting in the seats of power in the motion picture world. It is because I am so AGAINST Bolshevism that I want changes. I believe that brains and breeding and background are coming into their own in the picture world. I believe that vulgar showmanship and ten cent ideals are dying out. I believe that finer, subtler values will be appreciated, that the idealist, the poet, the dreamer and the philosopher will come in at the front studio gate as the too smart wise-crackers are shown out the back way.

And I believe that all this will come about because the people, the "fans", all over the world have demanded it!

A CORRECTION

An unfortunate error appeared in the page advertisement of the Western Costume Company in the last issue of The Spectator. At the end of the second paragraph of the letter addressed to Louis B. Mayer there appeared this sentence: "Also it costs us \$80,000.00 per month to maintain this stock in usual condition." The word "usual" should have read "usable", which gives the statement an entirely different meaning. The Spectator gladly makes this correction in justice to the Western Costume Company, which, by the way, is the world's largest costume house.

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Concerning Spectator Advertising

By Louis Jacobin, Advertising Manager, The Film Spectator

As I write, the editor of The Spectator is enjoying his first vacation since establishing his now famous periodical. Somewhere in the great Northwest he is rambling around in a car, traveling over billowing acres strewn with the passion of wild flowers, through virgin forests untouched as yet by the woodsman's axe or the relentless hand of the realtor. He is forgetting for a brief moment the land of make-believe, as his soul becomes enraptured in the serenity of lofty mountains wrapped in eternal snow, of green vales and cool, rippling rills, of turbulent streams whose laughing waters roll and tumble and foam over the boulders in their mad rush to the sea.

On the eve of his departure for the Northland, Mr. Beaton instructed me to assist in "lining up" the material for this issue of The Spectator. I have attempted to carry out the editor's orders to the letter, and have gone him one better. I have taken advantage of his absence by breaking into print myself, contrary to a steadfast policy. I am doing this because I have a message on advertising which I believe should be told, and I am to tell it at the risk of catching hell.

* * *

First of all, I want to say that while

my newspaper and advertising experience with various publications extends over a period of years, I have never before been so happily connected. It is far from dull, laborious work to handle my department. It is rather a pleasure. True, once in a while a bit of grief bobs up, but this is more than offset by the genuine satisfaction that it affords me to represent a publication so highly recognized by thinking men and women. Moreover, it has been a lot of fun for me to watch our advertising patronage grow and hold its own with the substantial weekly increase in circulation. A few months ago we carried only a few scattered ads. Today, The Spectator leads in the number of advertisements carried by the several local film publications. This record has been made despite the fact that the little magazine is less than two years old, charges a higher rate for space and sells it solely upon the merits of The Spectator as a desirable advertising medium, without promise of editorial support or write-ups of any sort whatever.

* * *

The writers, especially, are taking advantage of the splendid opportunity they have to keep their names and achievements before the industry. These intelligent, educated men and

women who supply so much of the real brains in the making of motion pictures, can appreciate the advertising value of this publication and the good it is accomplishing toward the perfection of the cinema art. Smart shops and other business establishments catering to the high-salaried motion picture people have been rather slow in accepting the best bet that has ever been offered to them in the way of a medium through which to increase their business and good will. But they, too, are beginning to look upon The Spectator with favor, and each succeeding issue finds an increase in the number of commercial advertisements.

With all due respect to those keen merchants who really know the relative value of various advertising mediums, I cannot help thinking sometimes that one of the great needs in the business world today is a school teaching the art of advertising. Millions of dollars are wasted every year in blue-sky advertising. With a thousand and one advertising propositions being presented to him by high-pressure salesmen, the average shopkeeper, who is too busy with his other business affairs to give the matter of advertising proper consideration, is apt to go wrong occasionally in his choice of mediums. A clear understanding of the psychology of advertising would prove a boon to the average merchant. It would also prove a boon to meritorious advertising propositions.

His scripts have been "shot" by such directors as William Beaudine, Harry Pollard,

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Marshall Neilan, Frank Urson, James Cruze, Erle Kenton, Wallace Worsley, Robt.

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STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

NOW that Greater Movie Season is at its height and the box-offices are clicking strongly all over the country, it should be of special interest to know just what type of production and just what trend of story are leading the field. In glancing over recent box-office figures it is readily seen that certain stereotyped forms of production are just about passé, while newer combinations are being introduced and meeting with the approval of Mr. and Mrs. Public.

Stories with the late World War as a locale have always been more or less of a speculation. During the last two or three years of the war and for a short time after, the market was literally flooded with "war stuff". Then for almost five years came a lull in this type, and producers sought other locales for their pictures. But in the fall of 1925 when King Vidor's *Big Parade* was released and became such an overwhelming success almost over night, it again reversed the tables, making the war a popular background for big film spectacles.

De Mille produced two of the most successful stories of this class, namely *Three Faces East* and *The Volga Boatman*.

Then the Fox studios contributed *What Price Glory?* which has proven such a sweeping success that they have engaged Laurence Stallings to write a sequel to it, which they will film in the near future.

M.-G.-M. in its very successful production of *Tell It to the Marines*, switched the war locale from Europe to China. But still this picture is in the modern warfare classification. Furthermore, M.-G.-M. re-issued *The Four Horsemen* and also released *Rex Ingram's Mare Nostrum*, which deals with submarine warfare on the Mediterranean in the World War. Both have been very well received by the public, as the box-office registers, although the production cost on the latter was far too great to be able to leave the M.-G.-M. Distributing Company much of a profit.

Paramount thought they would be different, and instead of filming modern warfare, dug back into history and produced *Old Ironsides* and *The Rough Riders*. *Old Ironsides*, as previously mentioned, has failed to hold up at the box-office, and the latter is only doing an average good business, while it was originally slated to be a road-show. Not to be outdone in the grand rush of war epics, Paramount again tried their luck with a modern war story, *Wings*, and evidently with much more success, as the box-office figures to date show. Therefore they are planning to film a sequel to *Wings*, *The Legion of the Condemned*, by the same author, John Monk Saunders.

First National lost so much money on their war epic, *June Mathis's Greater Glory*, which was supposed to

have been another *Four Horsemen*, that they have rather steered clear of "war stuff" for a while. However, when they took Dick Barthelmess from Inspiration Pictures and put him under their own management, they used a war story to start him off with. The exhibitors and film salesmen told Dick Rowland that Barthelmess' recent *Inspiration Pictures* had been so very poor that there was only one way to save him, which was for Dick to stage a big, smashing come-back in a super-special. So Rupert Hughes's *Patent Leather Kid* was selected, because it told of a big angle in the late war that had been overlooked in previous productions—that of the Tank Corps. Since *The Patent Leather Kid* has just opened, it is hard to estimate just how big a success it will be. Yet the advance seat sales seem to indicate very big!

Because Paramount's war story dealt with the Aviation Corps and Barthelmess' war story with the Tank Corps, Robert Kane thought he would take another angle and play up the navy's part in his production of *Convoy*. But *Convoy* missed fire and has proven a national flop. Yet this is to be expected when we consider the fact that practically all of Kane's First National releases, since *Bluebeard's Seven Wives*, have been box-office failures. Some day soon, the First National franchise holders will wake up and tell Dick Rowland that they are going to over-rule him and exclude the Kane pictures from their program.

One of the most important developments that has grown out of the numerous war epics has been the war comedies and the formation of male comedy teams by almost every producer in the business. Following the great success of *The Cohans* and the *Kellys*, the film market was deluged with Jewish-Irish comedies to such an extent that many of them didn't get a "break" and a good many of them "flopped" outright. Therefore the war comedy team has been a great relief, and has brought forth such successes as *Behind the Front*, *We're in the Navy Now*, *Tin Hats*, *Rookies*, *The Better 'Ole*, with *Two Arabian Knights* about to be released. In *Lost at the Front*, First National took their Jewish-Irish comedy team into the trenches with fairly successful results.

Among the various comedy teams now in production are Paramount's *Beery-Hatton* team and their *Conklin-Fields* team; M.-G.-M.'s *Dane-Arthur* team and their new *Polly Moran-Marie Dressler* team; P. D. C.'s *Allan Hale-Slim Summerville* team; First National's *Murray-Kelsey* team; Fox's *Sammy Cohen-Ted McNamara* team and Universal's *George Sydney-J. Farrell McDonald* team.

This line-up looks as if the comedy field will be more than well taken care

of for the ensuing season. So far the box-office, besides proving that these comedy teams are quite popular, has also proven that the originators still "take the cake". In other words, *Beery and Hatton*, who were the first war comedy team, are still playing to a very much bigger box-office business than their nearest competitors, although their latest, *Fireman, Save My Child*, has not been any too strong, which may indicate that the public is getting fed up on this sort of thing. However, I personally believe that this is only true because *Fireman, Save My Child* did not have the gags and situations that were found in *Behind the Front* and *We're in the Navy Now*.

Ever since *Harold Lloyd* and *Bebe Daniels* appeared in their two most successful box-office pictures, namely *The Freshman* and *The Campus Flirt*, the collegiate type of story has been particularly successful. This has been proven not only by features, but also by Universal's two-reel series, *The Collegians*, which have scored as well abroad as they have here in the States. The collegian type of story is more or less identified with the flapper type, which was so successfully introduced to the screen by *Colleen Moore* and *Clara Bow*, and which is so strongly supported at the box-office by the younger generation.

Among pictures now in production that should help supply the demand for the collegiate type are the *West Point* stories of *Billy Haines* and *Bill Boyd*. *Buster Keaton's College*, *Colleen Moore's Naughty But Nice*, and Paramount's *Rolled Stockings* with *Louise Brooks* and *James Hall*, are recent proven box-office hits, also of this class.

Heavy melodramas with strong love themes also seem very popular at the present time. *Seventh Heaven* and *Flesh and the Devil* have both played to record-breaking business wherever exhibited. Other pictures now being released in this class and which are almost playing to capacity business, include *Warner Brothers' In Old San Francisco* and Paramount's *Underworld* and *The Way of All Flesh*.

When *Chaplin* produced *A Woman of Paris* with *Adolphe Menjou*, he created a demand for a sophisticated type of society stuff that never has died, although it has changed from drama to comedy-drama. Paramount's series of the *Adolphe Menjou* sophisticated comedy-dramas have been very successful and are continuing to grow in popularity.

First National with *Lewis Stone* has attempted the same type of story, but not with much success. Six years ago *Stone* proved quite a sensation in *The Dangerous Age* and for a short time afterwards he held up well at the box-office. But by putting leading ladies opposite *Stone*, to whom he was old enough to be father—

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and in some cases almost grandfather—First National has killed the sense and reality of such pictures, and consequently Stone's pictures have suffered greatly at the box-office. Furthermore, First National has cast him in far too many releases, with the result that exhibitors claim that they have had to run two or three of his pictures in a row.

M.-G.-M. have had a little better luck with their Lew Cody series than First National have had with their Lew Stone series, and yet for sophisticated comedy-dramas they don't compare with the Menjou pictures, either in production quality or at the box-office. Cody's *Gay Deceiver* and *On Ze Boulevard* both were very weak because of poor stories and poor direction. The series in which he is now appearing, in which he is co-starred with Aileen Pringle, will probably do a much better business. The first of these, *Adam and Evil*, just released, is holding up fairly well so far.

It is especially interesting to note that these three portrayers of the sophisticated male have all recently appeared as waiters. The business they have played to, respectively, in their three pictures, is as follows:

Adolphe Menjou in <i>Service for Ladies</i>	81% capacity
Lewis Stone in <i>Prince of Headwaiters</i>	74% capacity
Lew Cody in <i>On Ze Boulevard</i>	65% capacity

The *Prince of Headwaiters* happens to be Lewis Stone's biggest hit in several years, while on the other hand, *On Ze Boulevard* has proven the biggest flop Lew Cody ever has appeared in. This does not necessarily mean that Lewis Stone makes a better waiter than Lew Cody. But it does prove that a good story and good direction are necessary to make a real box-office success. John Francis Dillon is a very capable director and had a very good script to use on *The Prince of Headwaiters*. But *On Ze Boulevard* had a jinx on it from the very start. The story was "re-hashed" several times and then Director Harry Millarde was withdrawn in the middle of the production and replaced by Christy Cabanne. Neither of these directors have very enviable box-office records, and furthermore it does not pay to change directors in the middle of a picture. After Harry Rapf's fine supervision of *Mr. Wu and Rookies*, it is quite disappointing to see what a mess he made out of *On Ze Boulevard*. Moral: Don't try to do too many things at once, especially at such an important task as supervising pictures.

Ever since *The Merry Widow* made new box-office history, stories having mythical kingdoms and central European countries as locales, have been more or less popular. *Graustark* and *Beverly of Graustark* both were very successful, and now we have *The Prince of Graustark* about to be filmed with Ramon Navarro starred. Billie Dove's latest release, *The Stolen Bride*, comes under this classification and is playing to a very strong box-

office, thanks to Carey Wilson's script and supervision.

The very newest cycle of successful pictures, however, seems to be based on current events of international importance. Several discriminating critics have said that the public wouldn't fall for this line of current events as backing for feature productions, as the news reels already have taken the edge off any possible worth-while situations. But the box-office, contrary to the critics, seems to prove that the public likes to see its idols in such roles.

Besides Paramount's aviation story, *Wings*, Universal is presenting an

aerial story, *The Lone Eagle*; Richard Dix, George O'Brien and Richard Barthelmess have all recently appeared as pugilists in stories of the ring. Bebe Daniels and Gertrude Ederle are appearing in *Swim, Girl, Swim*. And besides *Trudy*, Red Grange has made another production for F. B. O. Evidently baseball has only a limited following. While Billy Haines' *Slide Kelly Slide* and Wally Beery's *Casey at the Bat* both rang the bell at the box-office, *Babe Ruth* in his First National production, *Babe Comes Home*, has proven one of the outstanding flops of the past season.

VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

READERS AND PICTURES

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Madeleine Matzen's article, "Almost Anyone Can Read", in *The Film Spectator* interested me, because I was for a few years with the story department of one of the large producing companies.

Miss Matzen lays stress upon the snobbishness that exists in certain story departments, and she instances the fact that stories are often judged not so much by their merit as by their physical appearance in manuscript.

This is not exactly the case. It may be so in a few instances, but readers soon discover that some of the writers whose work is most eagerly sought by the producers, turn in very careless and often shabby manuscripts.

A worse type of snobbery is the manner assumed by certain of the young readers, with their stiff, professionally college bred attitude, who squint down their noses at the writers; who assume to patronize them when they call at the studios, and who talk with glib poise and authority. Thus the work of men and women who have made places for themselves in the literary world are judged by these arrogant and immature youngsters.

Of course, all readers are not of this type. There are some sincere, cultured and highly intelligent men and women who are working as readers in story departments. However, the remuneration for this work is so small and the demands so heavy that it is rather remarkable that we are able to secure the services of any but people of mediocre intelligence. Moreover, the readers are so poorly regarded as to seem to be mere nonentities. Perhaps the reason why the producers despise them is because they are willing to work for so little; because also they are meek and lowly and allow themselves to be "bawled out" or ignored without protest.

This is the work of a reader: To read novels, short stories, plays, syndicated newspaper stuff, original manuscripts, etc.; to write synopses of the stories read and give forth constructive criticism and comment.

The pay for this work averages

about \$30 a week. In fact, readers get about the salaries of the average stenographer or secretary, and indeed the secretary of an executive is treated with far greater deference and considered of more importance than a mere reader.

Miss Matzen is right. This work should be done by the highest type of mind. It is just as important to a producer to have skilled readers as to have skilled scenarists. A reader should not merely turn out dull, wooden synopses, but so treat his or her work that, in a way, the synopses should be as clear-cut as adaptations. I do not say this should be done with every story read. It should be done certainly with every story recommended.

A story editor and his readers should first of all be possessed (have, in fact, the gift) of story sense. They should know and recognize good stories when they read them; be able to think them into picture ideas; treat and adapt them so that in clear, graphic words they may be set down and made comprehensible to the studio heads and executives to whom they must be sold.

Story sense is a valuable product on the motion picture market. The editor or reader possessed with this sense should be of as much value to the producer as an adapter, a scenarist or a continuity writer. Story sense calls for imagination, sensitiveness, dramatic perception, human understanding, a knowledge of people and of life. The reader and editor should study the psychology of motion picture audiences and note what they react to. They will never learn this by merely attending previews and openings and sticking before a typewriter all day. That is one reason why the maturer men and women make the better readers. They know life and people.

The story department is the source of the product which makes our pictures. To despise the underpaid story editors and readers; to man the department with young and cheap help shows poor judgment on the part of the producers. It has always been a mystery to me how it is possible to

obtain the services of readers at the salaries paid. A well known author read books for a motion picture company at \$5 a book—and this is not an uncommon case. She told me once she was able by persistent work to do four a week. That is, read and synopsized them. She did not explain how she found the time to do her original writing. At this particular time, as I recall it, her books were not listed among the best sellers and she was very much in need of the \$5 a book. She was responsible, through her remarkable synopses, for the buying of some of the greatest pictures produced.

I do not agree with Miss Matzen

that old writers are in a rut and that the new writer will do better work. Who and what are the new writers? Does Miss Matzen mean the younger writers? No natural writer ever gets in a rut. That is to say, no one with the real gift of thought and ability to express himself. The trouble is, too many hacks, men and women turning out stereotyped, manufactured, studio-worn stuff, both among the readers and the scenario writers, are kept in place just as Miss Matzen suggests, through politics, or because they have become a sort of fixture or habit. On the other hand, we have the spectacle of the flapper writers. Fresh, cocksure youngsters who think they know it all,

and between the two evils it is hard to know which is the worst. Readers should be chosen first and last because of their ability—their talent. That is important,—and an editor should be able to discover this after a test or two with books assigned to them to read.

Ex-Editor.

FROM A LIBRARY FREQUENTER
Dear Sir:

I had the good fortune this evening of discovering your magazine for the first time, in the local public library. I became interested immediately and, having read it through, requested the librarian to let me have all the avail-

JOSEPH FRANKLIN POLAND

Supervising Editor of Feature Comedies

UNIVERSAL

The adaptation and continuity of "A Man's Past" showed fine skill.

(Jas. P. Calhoun in The Film Mercury)

"A MAN'S PAST"

From the German play, "Diploma"

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by

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HE. 7715

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The Chicago Theatre Strike

By NORMAN WEBB

able back numbers. The library doors are now closed and I've been ejected but, thanks to your magazine, I've had a very enjoyable evening. When one recalls the short-comings of the majority of our films, it is very irritating and it is about time that claws and teeth were laid bare and a few quills thrown.

I have an awful nose for detail and I often leave a theatre literally swearing at the idiots who have spoiled what might have been a good picture by lack of judgment or observation. The mention of *The Yankee Clipper* set me boiling. How well I recall seeing that picture. I, too, noticed the flag but that was but one of many blunders and insults to the intelligence of the beholder. Another picture that almost made me weep with indignation was *Bardelys the Magnificent*. This picture was full of preposterous situations and mistakes in costumes and settings. It was at times a mere burlesque of some of the fine acting of Douglas Fairbanks.

Your readers seem to take great pleasure in finding any fault in your punctuation, grammar or spelling. I saw none but, just to show you that I'm a bit on the alert, I might ask you to explain the following:

In the issue of August 6, 1927, page 10, you say "I never saw Kent before" and in the issue of May 19, 1927, page 7, I find "The fact that I never heard of Arnold Kent, etc.". How come? Perhaps in your later issue you were recalling a review that took place previously to the one mentioned in the earlier number.

Have you seen Richard Dix in *Manpower*? The plot is identical with that of a picture starring "Wallie" Reed about six years ago. The "Mack" truck was used in Reid's picture instead of a tractor but the plot was the same all the way through.

HARRY P. BRAISTED.

New Haven, Conn.

AN ENGLISHMAN CONCURS

Dear Mr. Beaton:

A friend sent me your letter containing your arresting and remarkable articles dealing with the respective merits of the films, *The King of Kings* and *From Manger to Cross*. I have not seen the film *The King of Kings* and therefore, cannot sit in judgment, but I can say that I agree with you when you talk of the great grip of Sidney Olcott as a director. He is a very remarkable man—a leader of men. Given the subjects, I am confident that he would make the world's most remarkable pictures. I have never seen any company throw themselves into their task with such earnestness as the company working under the aegis of Sidney Olcott.

It was entirely owing to him that the film *From Manger to Cross* suggests a note of spiritual passion which seems to communicate itself to the people who see it unfolded on the screen. I thank you most cordially for your appreciation.

R. HENDERSON BLAND.

219a Maida Vale, London, W.

A SHORT time ago *The Spectator* took up the issue of the proposed 10% salary cut, condemning it, and stating that the trouble was not in high salaries, but rather in the mismanagement of studios by their present executives. Mr. Beaton in his editorial pointed out that while it was Jesse Lasky who originally proposed the 10% salary cut, it was also his studio that had been among the biggest wasters of unlimited amounts of money on scenes and sets that never were shown on the screen.

Now along comes the Chicago theatre strike which closed approximately 411 theatres for a six-day period at a reported loss of \$1,000,000, according to Associated Press dispatches. Although this theatre gross loss is greatly exaggerated, it is safe to say that the lost revenue was around \$100,000 a day, or a total of \$600,000 for the six days that the theatres were closed. I know for a positive fact that the four biggest Publix-Balaban & Katz first run houses, namely the Oriental, the Chicago, McVickers and the Roosevelt, together lost \$24,000 a day, or \$144,000 over a six-day period that they were closed. Accordingly, I believe I am quite safe in estimating the loss of the other 407 theatres at \$456,000 for the six days.

This unnecessary strike proves all the more just how badly the largest producer-distributor-exhibitor corporations are mismanaged in their home offices, as well as in their studios. I call the strike unnecessary because it was known before it came to pass

just when and why it was due, and it could have been settled just as easily with the theatres operating as with them locked up, while the public waited in line outside.

Since Jesse Lasky is vice-president in charge of production, we can hardly hold him responsible for the strike, but rather Sam Katz, president of Publix Theatres and a member of the board of directors of the Paramount-Famous-Lasky Corporation. Although the strike actually started in an Orpheum house, the Publix executives could easily have averted the strike, since Chicago has been a Publix controlled theatre city ever since that corporation took over the operation of the Balaban & Katz houses, just one year ago.

But since Publix and Paramount are one and the same, the loss is also one and the same. If Messrs Lasky & Katz would learn how to run their company on a good solid business basis, it would not be necessary for them to recommend salary cuts for writers, directors, actors and technicians, who have devoted their entire lives to making the motion picture industry what it is to-day, the fourth biggest in the United States.

The \$600,000 gross loss of the Chicago theatres, which was a deliberate waste of money, would be sufficient to give every one of the 1,100 Paramount Studio employees a \$10 a week raise for one whole year. I hope the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will remember this incident, when the four branches mentioned above have another confab with their brother producers' branch!

MOWING 'EM OVER

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Although I very rarely agree with a single word that you have to say, and despite the fact that I often find the snap judgments you render conducive to excessive heat under the collar, yet I have stolen or borrowed, and once or twice purchased each succeeding issue of your invariably interesting magazine. Intelligent and civilized writing, even though it be based, as in your case, upon a very febrile conception of the motion picture industry, is so rare and refreshing when compared to the drool offered by the other trade and fan magazines, that one can not really afford to miss it.

To save myself the tiresome necessity of swiping *The Film Spectator* from the desks of my colleagues here, I am, therefore, sending you a check for a year's subscription, and with it go my very best wishes for yourself and your magazine.

F. HUGH HERBERT.

DELINQUENT LIST

The *Spectator* acts in good faith when it introduces advertisers to its readers. It assumes also that its ad-

vertisers are acting in good faith towards it when they insert advertisements. When it finds out otherwise it is not going to trouble lawyers about it. It expects those who can pay for their advertising to do so. Those who are unfortunate can explain their circumstances and nothing harsh is going to happen to them. Those who can pay and refuse to do so, and who ignore all the letters we write to them, and even send us flippant messages to "try to get it", are not going to be bothered. We are going to publish a delinquent list, and let it go at that.

Those whom we found it was unwise to extend credit to are:

Reed Heustis, screen writer.

Fred H. Bagley, public accountant and income tax specialist.

The fine performance of Clive Brook in *Underworld* was a revelation in polished acting, and consequently worth studying. As the down-and-outer, he proved himself to be a brilliant character actor, his revulsion against the cuspidor being especially notable for its naturalness. *Underworld* should prove to the scoffers that von Sternberg was in every way worthy of the early predictions that were made about him.

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THINK about motion pictures.*

HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, OCTOBER 1, 1927

In Appreciation of Friends' Contributions

ONLY partly back on the job. The lakes in which mountains stand on their heads, streams which form pools where trout lurk, roads that tunnel through verdure, and landscapes that are forever green pull hard when you should turn your back on them. But there's another year, and others after it, and the lakes and streams and roads will be there, and the eternal eye-esting green. My holiday, taken quite as much for Spectator readers as for myself, was made possible only through the kindness of those who filled the Contributors' Number so full that it overflowed into this number, and there are still a few valuable articles that will make their appearance still later. In every way the Contributors' Number was a great success. It was one of the most thoughtful contributions to screen discussion ever compiled. For me, personally, it solved the problem of obtaining a short rest during which to store up vigor for another eleven months' work. In the next number, and in subsequent ones, until another holiday time comes around, I will occupy my usual space. Meanwhile, I have things to say in the following pages about pictures I saw while I was away.

* * *

Picking Them Up Along the Road

POKING about the country to get away from motion pictures and viewing one on every possible occasion is not my idea of a holiday for one who has a fifty-two week job on The Spectator, but it is exactly the kind of holiday I have had, and I enjoyed it immensely. It gave me contact with real audiences, not the half-wise ones that we have in Los Angeles and Hollywood. I saw pictures in towns under ten thousand in population, and in that surprisingly metropolitan looking Puget Sound metropolis, Seattle. I found that the audiences laughed at pretty much the same thing all along the line. The sum total of my observations strikes a note akin to pathos. I left theatres feeling sorry for the audiences. When I saw what they applauded and laughed at, and reflected how very much better the same pictures could have been made by intelligent producers or supervisors, I felt that those who

paid to see them had been defrauded of something rightfully theirs. When we purchase an article we have the right to assume that we are receiving in exchange for our money the most perfect article that can be produced for that much money. When we buy a ticket to see Fred Thompson and his horse in a picture we have the right to presume that we are to see the best picture that money and brains can make. I saw a Thompson picture somewhere along the line, either in Medford or Eugene, Oregon, and was interested in the cordial reception it received from the crowded house. At the slightest hint of comedy there was spontaneous laughter, and the thrilling spots evoked applause. And still it was about the silliest thing I ever saw on the screen. Arizona Nights, it was called, in case you have seen it. None of the major situations was built on anything reasonable, and the comedy had as much to do with the story as it had to do with *The King of Kings*. "But," one of our brilliant producers will protest, "you say the house was crowded and the audience seemed pleased. What more can you expect?" The fact that a producer would talk that way is what is the matter with pictures. The poor quality of brains that we have running the business does not grasp the fact that pictures have a tomorrow. No Western star on earth, no matter how good his horse is, can build anything permanent on such utter rot as *Arizona Nights*. It pleases audiences that are craving Westerns and can get nothing better, but it can not hold its audiences. Fred Thompson is young enough to have many years before him yet. He knows nothing about acting, but is a handsome, manly chap who gives the impression of having lived cleanly and being a square shooter. Silver King, his horse, is a truly magnificent animal. It would be a simple matter to give the two of them stories that would get their pictures into the biggest houses all over the world, and at the same time would cause more laughter and provoke more applause in Oregon towns than they do now. Westerns are perhaps the only pictures that

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Oh,
I fain would sing of pictures—
Most delectable of arts—
So brimmed with latent promise
To enrapture human hearts;
Of such potential power
To fan emotion's fires
'Till they'd leap in sheer exuberance
From the embers of desires.

Well,
I read the gripping product
Of a writer's skilful pen,
That conjured moving pictures
Of the days when men were men,
And so clever his depiction,
Such the magic of his art
That a fellowship of feeling
Warmed the cockles of my heart.

Well,
My fancy went adventuring—
A barque on Aegean sea—
Old Ulysses and his rovers
Had not a thing on me;
I heard soft breezes whisper,
Heard the lookout's "All is well" . . .
(In this mood I saw the picture)—
! = ! ! * * § ‡ † || ° ° × + !

—GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN.

have universal appeal, yet on every lot they are held in low esteem. A writer apologizes for writing a Western, a director is ashamed to direct it and an actor blushes when he confesses that he is working in it, yet Westerns could be the most popular pictures before the public to-day if our production executives were equipped with ordinary business brains.

* * *

Someone Calling For Mr. Fullerton

THESE remarks are more or less rambling, as I was rambling around considerably when I received the impressions that inspired them. I am writing them in a secluded corner in the lobby of the Hotel Olympic, Seattle, where I have found a chair that offers the same degree of comfort as the one in which I sit, my pad on my knee, in my Hollywood home. The spot would be an ideal one for a morning of literary effort if Mr. Fullerton would answer the telephone. For at least an hour, "Call for Mr. Fullerton!" has come at five-minute intervals until I have grown to hate him and those who call him up. My task this morning is a delicate one. I must sort out all the pieces of pictures that I have seen in the last ten days and discuss them intelligently. I can not do this while I am wondering why so many people want to speak to Mr. Fullerton, or why one person is so persistent in his desire to tell him something. I must be careful or I will have Aileen Pringle playing opposite Clyde Cook and Rod La Rocque making love to Louise Brooks. At home I review each picture immediately after seeing it, and never carry more than one in my mind at once. Now I have six or seven to unscramble. The last I saw was *The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary*, which May Robson made so gay on the stage and Metropolitan makes so sad on the screen. It is a long time since I saw the play, and can remember very little about it, but there must have been something in it to make it so popular for so long a time. The picture is almost devoid of sense. I do not know if the blame can be attached to Zella Sears's story or to Earle Kenton's direction or to general studio stupidity. Part of the blame goes to the titles, which were childish. The whole point of the story, the rejuvenation of the crabby old woman, is covered in a title. Nothing is made of the comedy possibilities of the arrest of the aunt, and the court scene which follows it is too hopelessly ridiculous to be taken seriously and is handled too seriously to be regarded as farce. An automobile race, inserted for its production value, is treated with the same lack of intelligence that characterizes the whole picture, or, at least, as much of it as I sat through. All chance of making it thrilling was ruined when an ambulance was shown keeping up with the racing cars. The idea of having an ambulance follow the aunt and the hero was a funny one, but to achieve its full comedy value it should have been treated intelligently. The merest infant in an audience knows that an ambulance can not keep abreast of a car that travels considerably over one hundred miles an hour and no scene that shows an ambulance doing so can be really funny. You can not say to an audience, "This is comedy. Laugh." Comedy succeeds in the degree that it achieves the most fun with the most reason. Chaplin never strives for a laugh by doing something that the audience knows really can not be done. If a little more brains had been utilized in making this

Metropolitan picture the ambulance sequence could have been made both funny and reasonable. Also all the rest of the picture might have been rich in entertainment value. It simply is a production that is counted on to get by on account of the title and star. It is a cheap swindle on the public, but it's done in pictures.

* * *

"Fighting Eagle" as Roadside Diversion

PHYLLIS HAVER is in this Aunt Mary picture, and I saw her in *The Fighting Eagle*, which I ran across some place or other. If Mr. Fullerton would get his call, thus closing the incident, I might be able to recollect the town. In both pictures I thought her talents were wasted. In the Robson production she is pretty and sweet, but it is a part that scores of other girls in Hollywood could play as well, for it makes no demands upon acting ability. In *The Fighting Eagle* she has more to do, and does it excellently, but it is not the kind of part that should be given her. She excels as a mischievous little devil, such as she was in *Nobody's Widow*, and may be able to handle more dramatic parts as acceptably. In any case, she should be presented as an actress, and not as a conventional girl lead. *The Fighting Eagle* manages to escape being a really good picture. It has everything that a good picture should have, but it appeared to me that a combination of a poor script and indifferent direction robbed it of all the opportunities it had to be something worth while. It interested me to notice that the credits were cut out when I saw it, the main title and the cast being all that were given. Adam and Evil received similar treatment in some other town. However, I happen to know that Donald Crisp directed *The Fighting Eagle*, and I think he made a very poor job of it. It is fearfully movie. When Rod La Roque is arrested Phyllis secretes some papers in his hat in order that they will be carried to Napoleon. She does it while entirely surrounded by soldiers, any one of whom would have detected her. It is very raw. Then every little while someone almost finds the hat, a rather cheap and silly way of teasing an audience. Sally Rand is cast as the secretary of the great Tallyrand, a ridiculous bit of casting. It is giving to a child a part that should have been played by a Louise Dresser, or by someone else who looks as forceful and mature as Louise. Putting pretty young girls in parts simply because they are pretty and young, thus overlooking opportunities to bring out all the drama there is in stories, is a very foolish habit. All the pictures supervised by Gardner Sullivan stick pretty closely to movie traditions, and this one is no exception. In it the close-up evil is rife. A clash of wits between Phyllis and Sam de Grasse is shown in close-ups of one another which flash back and forth long after the point is put over. The champion close-up of all time is in this picture. It is an individual close-up of Rod while he is kissing Phyllis. If anyone ever saw a more idiotic close-up I wish he would write me about it. The part of Brigadier Gerard, played by La Roque, offered a chance for a notable characterization, but neither star nor director seemed to have any appreciation of its possibilities. Rod plays it as a movie star and not as a soldier of Napoleon. In the final scene between Gerard and Napoleon the camera features the former, and makes the great emperor appear as a person

of much less importance. That one scene spoils the whole characterization of Napoleon which Max Barwyn so carefully built up. It makes the great soldier, one of the most notable figures of all time, play second fiddle to a screen actor. I am surprised that such an intellectual man as Crisp did not appreciate this. When we take a great figure from history and put him on the screen he must dominate every scene in which he appears. In this picture Napoleon is gracious to Gerard, but the whole idea back of the scene is ruined by making the emperor look so unimportant that his graciousness becomes unimportant. In that one scene, at least, Donald should have forgotten that Rod is a star.

* * *

"Adam and Evil" and Bob Leonard

THESE are not more than a dozen directors whose pictures are at all times free from old fashioned stuff that reminds us that they are movies. This dozen will remain at the top of the list when we make pictures sensibly. They are the ones who think, and who do not compose their scenes to suit the cameraman. Even under the present weird system of making pictures they would be improved greatly if before a director shot a scene he would go into conference with himself and ask himself just why he was shooting it that way. In a scene in Adam and Evil two characters are seated at a round table in a cafe. It is a large table and they sit close together. I would like to ask Bob Leonard why he shot the scene that way. His only possible answer would be that he did it to accommodate the camera, a system by which good pictures never will be made. If Bob and Gertrude went to the Cocomat Grove and were escorted by Jimmy to two places at an otherwise deserted large, round table, Bob would say things to Jimmy. The only way they would be seated would be facing one another across a table for two. In the same picture Lew Cody, a twin, gets a telegram to meet himself at the train. We are shown the telegram. When Lew arrives at the depot he turns to face the camera, takes the telegram from his pocket and reads it. Why? Didn't he know where he was? Did he have to be reminded why he was at the depot? It is just one of those silly shots for which there is no reason. Years ago someone started the habit of having his characters pull telegrams from their pockets before they could give directions to a taxi driver, read a street number or decipher a sign on an office door, and directors who don't think have not outgrown the habit. There is more old stuff in this Leonard picture. Aileen Pringle answers a telephone call. The phone is on a table which stands against the wall. She walks to it, picks up the phone and turns to face the camera as she converses. Why? If it was necessary to show her face while she was talking, why have the phone against the wall? If it was necessary to have the phone against the wall, why have her turn when she used it? Was there any reason why she should not stand naturally and carry on her conversation with her back to the camera? None whatever, except that movie traditions must be adhered to. However, I enjoyed Adam and Evil. Leonard has a lively sense of humor and on the whole his direction always is good. The story is a gay one and the picture is made a delightful one largely by the charming acting of Aileen Pringle. Heretofore I have seen Miss Pringle in parts that were either too austere or

too silly to make her register strongly with me, but in this picture she is captivating as a young married woman with a sense of humor. There is an opening on the screen for just such a girl in just such parts, but among those in authority on the Metro lot there is no one with enough brains to pick stories that have the necessary cleverness to put such a girl over. Lew Cody is quite amusing as the twins. His drunk scene is very well done. Someone else wants Mr. Fullerton—damn him!—on the phone.

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Some Remarks on Keaton's "College"

COLLEGE, Buster Keaton's latest, is one of the various pictures which I saw on my travels which were presented without credits. I hunted up the manager of the house in which I viewed it and asked him why he eliminated them. He told me that he did it partly to save footage, but principally because his audiences were not interested in who directed his pictures, photographed them or wrote the stories. He asked me why Hollywood insisted upon including in its pictures the names of all those who assisted in making them, while all that interested the public was the cast. I told him that I did not know, but that in the present instance I would like to know who directed the picture and who wrote the story, but apparently he considered it too much trouble to hunt up his cut-outs and give me the information. I understood that Buster directed his own pictures until he engaged Chuck Reisner to handle the one he is making now. In my review of The General I advised him to get better stories and to engage a director. Some of the sequences in College indicate that the advice was taken in regard to the director, but I can see no evidence of an improvement in the story. The baseball game was directed splendidly, and is put on the screen with a degree of naturalness that seldom is attained. The same can be said for the track and field events. In fact, there are no weaknesses in any of the direction. But as a picture, College has the one supreme weakness of containing no real comedy. In it Keaton is presented as a dumbbell in everything but studies, and laughs are striven for by making him do foolish, not funny, things. As a soda clerk he misses an egg that he tries to catch. As an athlete he knocks over every hurdle he tries to jump. In both these respects I could have done as well as Buster. I can miss as many eggs and knock over as many hurdles. I might not perform these feats in a way to make Buster laugh, but as he did not perform them in a way to make me laugh, I still don't see that he has anything on me. You can not build comedy on purely negative acts that in themselves are unreasonable. Keaton comes to commencement to be presented with a scholarship medal. He walks into the meeting with an umbrella over his head. Even if he did it in a funny manner, which he does not, it would have little appeal as comedy, for a man who would do such a thing could not possibly be intelligent enough to win the medal. The act that betrays him as a halfwit belies the title that makes him brilliant. Chaplin, with his inherent pathos, might get away with such a part, but Keaton, lacking this great appeal, can not make it convincing. Yet I consider Buster Keaton to be one of the greatest screen actors we have. He deliberately has chosen a characterization that gives his talents definite limitations, but even within those limitations he demonstrates what a real artist he is. He is essentially a situation comedian, but

fills his pictures with situations which ignore the fundamentals of comedy. He endeavors to make himself an athlete to win the girl he loves. Where Chaplin might make such strivings pathetic, Keaton succeeds only in making them foolish. A feature of his characterization that I like, though, is the promise it gives of a gradual departure from the "frozen face" foolishness he has adhered to for so long. He does not smile, but he becomes animated several times, and they are his best moments. We'll have him laughing yet, and when he gets that far and has good stories and proper direction, he will have arrived. Anne Cornwall, quite a delightful little person, is his leading woman in *College*, and is fully equal to the part. There are some excellent titles in it. One feature that intrigued me was the manner in which some of the most subtle points were put over in medium and long shots. One of the many crazy notions of motion picture people is that it is only in close-ups that points can be registered with sufficient emphasis to make them plain to the audience. That it is a crazy notion is shown by the treatment given some of the finest points in this Keaton picture.

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"Secret Studio" a Feeble Affair

WHEN I saw *The Secret Studio* at the Pantages theatre in Seattle there were no credits given. I do not know who directed it or who wrote the story. As I viewed it I came to the conclusion that it must be the first public offering of the university children to whom the Fox organization seems determined to trust its literary welfare. If so, it is a good start, for there are assembled in it practically all the screen faults that the young people must outgrow. To start with, Olive Borden should not be starred. She lacks both the ability and the photographic attractiveness that would qualify her for such distinction. The story of *The Secret Studio* is utterly ridiculous. It commits a fault that you find in many pictures, but which a producer can not get away with: taking an effect as an established fact without having completely developed the cause. Olive becomes an artist's model. She poses for two pictures and is the talk of the town. Men rave over her and women envy her. She wears million dollar outfits and gorgeous jewels. I had no idea that posing for pictures was such a lucrative occupation, or that it so spontaneously produced fame for one indulging in it. To prove that the girl is not that kind of a girl she indignantly spurns a suggestion that she pose in the nude. That establishes the fact that she has the moral rectitude to qualify her to be the heroine of a motion picture, even though later she is seen posing virtually in the nude, and has acquired clothes with an abundance that would make their source disturbing food for suspicious minds. "Have I not made you?" roars Ben Bard, all het up by the fires of passion burning within him. Made her what? That is the question which the story had to answer before it could be acceptable screen material. It is bad technic to show the characters in a sequence reacting to its scenes in a way contrary to that in which the audience will react. There is nothing in this whole picture that would make an audience enthusiastic over the girl, therefore to have the extras in scenes with her go wild over her attractiveness is to put a too great stress upon the credulity of the audience. Enthusiasm on the screen must be developed, not taken for granted. It can be developed off-stage. You can introduce

a girl with a flourish of trumpets following a title that she is a famous dancer; but you can not introduce her as an unknown, have her do a few simple steps that would enthrall no one, and show the spectators going crazy over her. To be convincing on the screen the dance turn must enthrall the people viewing the picture as much as it does the people in the scene with the girl. In *The Secret Studio* the mistake is made of showing all that the girl does, which could not possibly make her famous, and then planting her fame with a wild burst of enthusiasm. You've seen the same thing in dozens of pictures. The "comedy relief" in this picture is even sillier and more pointless than such interpolations usually are. In spots the direction is crude. People, enthusiastic over the attractiveness of a picture, cluster in front of it to admire it, but there is a broad lane through the group to enable the camera to catch the picture. It is amazing how often you see this particularly brainless bit of grouping. I am grateful to *The Secret Studio* for giving me another glimpse of Margaret Livingstone. I have seen her only in short bits, but I have seen enough in them to make me wonder why some producer does not wake up to the fact that she is one of the cleverest girls we have, one capable of giving a marvelous performance in a suitable part.

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"Romance" a Regular Movie

CONSIDERING the story possibilities, the generally acceptable direction, the satisfactory cast, and the amount of money spent on it, *Romance*, starring Ramon Navarro, leaves one singularly unmoved. It was done beautifully from a production standpoint, but gets nowhere. Few of its sins were committed by John S. Robertson who directed. The man who gave us such a splendid picture as *Captain Salvation* ran foul of a weak story and unintelligent editing in *Romance*. I saw it in San Francisco, and, as was the case with all the pictures I saw while roaming around, there were no credits given, consequently I do not know whom to blame for the literary lapses. One would think that in a picture with such a title the romance would be developed. It is not. It is one of those spontaneous combustion affairs. Ramon takes one good look at Marceline Day, kisses her—and there's your romance. It could have been a beautiful love story, and I know of no two people who could have done it more credit than Navarro and the sweet, refined looking Marceline. Instead of building a real romance, Metro simply gives us another movie, that observes most of the movie traditions. Marceline's duenna betrays her mistress by handing to Marc McDermott some letters given to her for transmission to Havana. She does it stealthily—in the middle of a large patio entirely surrounded by windows. Strangely enough, some one sees her do it. Navarro, in the guise of a strolling mountebank, climbs to Marceline's balcony under the pretext of doing a card trick and imparts some information to her in a manner so secretive that no one except the hundreds of people gazing at the balcony would suspect that there was anything going on. Sequences that could have been made dramatic by intelligent treatment contain no drama whatever. Navarro sings a long song and the words are recorded on the screen, retarding the action and accomplishing nothing. Later he sings another song with a message in it for Marceline, thereby establishing the fact that the purpose of the first song

was to serve as a "tie-up" with the second. It was purely a mechanical bit of technic, an unthinking obeisance to the law that calls for "tie-ups" whenever possible, but in this instance there was no call for it. Although Marceline gives no evidence anywhere in the picture of being weak on her pins, Navarro picks her up and carries her when the two want to go anywhere together. The picture swash-buckles now and then. Navarro has an encounter with a bunch of swordsmen who would have subjugated anyone except a movie hero. More unimaginative treatment. It would have been more dramatic to have shown the hero on the point of being killed when he was first attacked, and to have brought the King's soldiers to his rescue at that time, making the whole sequence shorter, but brimful of suspense. By the movie method of treatment it was accorded Navarro keeps whacking at his attackers with mathematical precision until he has conquered all of them. Then comes the rescue party. It is hard to believe that such utterly childish stuff is done even when you see it on the screen. There is nothing the matter with Navarro in this picture. He is an excellent actor. When, if ever, his productions are handled by intelligent people, he is going to be a sensational success. Marceline also is very good. She is equal to every demand of a role that has several strong scenes in it. Roy d'Arcy plays a conventional heavy just a little better than a lot of other people would play it. I still have hopes of seeing this really splendid actor in a part that suits him. Marc McDermott contributes a fine characterization to *Romance*.

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Darryl Zanuck Writes a Letter

DARRYL ZANUCK, who shares with Jack Warner the responsibility for the very poor pictures that Warner Brothers turn out, writes me a letter about my review of *The Devil's Paradise* which appeared some issues ago. I find the letter among some papers I carried off with me to read some time during my rambles. In my review I praised the Curtiz picture on the whole, but I contended that the story was built on a wrong premise. Buster Collier kills a crazy man who attacks him with a bayonet, but instead of offering in his defense at the subsequent court martial that the man was crazy and that it was a question of his life or Collier's, the latter refuses to answer questions and is found guilty of murder. His refusal is based on his fear that Irene Rich's name will become involved in scandal. Of course the whole thing is utterly absurd, but Zanuck defends it. "Of the facts that there had been a struggle," he writes, "and that John Miljan was insane there could be no doubt, but is it necessary for us at the trial to bring up those trivial points?" If I were being tried for murder I would hate to have my counsel whisper to me, "I know that if we present this bit of evidence it will clear you, but is it necessary for us to bring up such a trivial point?" Another point in Zanuck's letter will enlighten criminal lawyers. Apparently when a crazy man attacks you with the intention of exploring your interior with the point of a bayonet you must not defend yourself unless you have an "underlying motive". The fact that you wish to save your life is not sufficient. "When they asked for the underlying motive," Zanuck writes, "Collier consistently refused to answer, which was, naturally, to shield the woman in the case." It is hard to answer an argument as dull as Zanuck's. The whole

point of my objection to the story was that the obvious plea of self defence would have kept any woman's name from entering the case, whereas idiotic questions about "underlying motives" would have been a sure way to drag her in. Self preservation is its own complete defence, and to suggest "underlying motives" in connection with it is absurd. But it is not the only absurdity in Zanuck's letter. Here's another: "I am sorry, though, that Mr. William Russell did not look enough like an Englishman to you. Both of Mr. Russell's parents were born in London, and, for your benefit hereafter, I will have footnotes on the introduction titles, telling the age, place of birth, and ancestry of all actors appearing in our productions." Perhaps from this extract we can get an estimate of the degree of mentality that enters into the Warner output. Here is a man who in a great measure influences the production of a large studio and who argues that a man must be a good English type because his parents were English! If Zanuck were qualified for the position he holds he would know that there are thousands of English actors who have never been outside England who would not be cast as English officers. Some of the best English types on the stage are Americans, and vice versa. Bill Russell might have been born in Picadilly Circus, but that would not alter the fact that there is nothing about him to suggest the British officer. He has neither the appearance, carriage nor smartness that should characterize such a part, something that Zanuck would know if he had that broad, general knowledge that a man should possess to make him a capable supervisor of production.

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What Ails Most Warner Pictures

MR. ZANUCK has more to say. In another place in this paper I quote him fully and without comment, but here I will set down another sample of his line of thought that will help to explain why the Warner Brothers pictures are so very bad: "However, it appears to me that you have completely solved all the mysteries, as well as the ailments and idiosyncrasies of Mr. Warner and myself. Therefore, inasmuch as you have made such a definite success in this undertaking, I suggest that you forget motion pictures, and pick on an industry which needs the immediate attention of a genius like yourself. . . . However, *The Film Spectator* is necessary to the industry—and I am sincere when I say this—as what would a Sunday paper be, without its funny sheet?" Mr. Zanuck flatters himself immensely when he suggests that I have made him the subject of study. His confession that he has some ailments confirms a conviction that obtruded itself upon me as I viewed pictures he supervised, and his frank acknowledgement of the importance of the funny sheets seems to enlighten us as to his idea of intellectual diversion. That the Sunday comics are the inspiration for Warner pictures we can believe when we see the pictures, but I must confess that I never was stirred by a funny supplement sufficiently to prompt me to write a long letter for publication in it. I welcome to *Spectator* pages letters dealing with subjects appropriate to them, and my personality is not included among the appropriate subjects. Ordinarily I ignore letters that make me an issue and publish the others without comment, but I have taken Darryl Zanuck's letter apart and examined it with interest because it is written by a man

high up in production circles. It gives us a glimpse of a personality that is in a position to reflect itself upon the screen, and the glimpse reveals a man without perception enough to be logical and manners enough to be good natured. He and Jack Warner jointly supervise the Warner output and between them they manage to give the public mostly cinematic junk with a Devil's Paradise now and then as a rare and surprising interlude. Along the road I have travelled lately I have viewed two pictures from this studio, *The Missing Link* and *Simple Sis*. Both are sorry affairs, unredeemed by any of the virtues that pictures should reflect. But Mr. Zanuck says I am not competent to discuss them. Let me quote from him again: "I don't think I would ever criticize the mill's harness factory, unless I had been inside of same—and I don't think you should criticize, unless you know whereof you speak." Zanuck is engaged in the literary end of a literary art, and if this quotation has any literary merit it is too profound for my poor intellect. He denies me the right to meddle with his occupation of making pictures, but I will be more generous and treat him seriously as a meddler in my occupation of writing. "Same", in the manner in which he uses it in this quotation, is a solecism in which any writer would be ashamed to indulge. It is on a par with "alright" which appears in a title in one of the two pictures I mention above, I forget which. I would like to point out to Zanuck that there is no such word in the English language. It is considered by writers to be the height of lowbrowism. It is not alright for Zanuck to use same. Perhaps he can understand that.

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Janet Gaynor Deserves Something Much Better

ONE thing that *Seventh Heaven* establishes is the fact that Janet Gaynor is perhaps the greatest natural actress who ever appeared on the screen. The only limit to her possibilities as a public favorite is the degree of common sense possessed by those for whom she makes pictures. When Sol Wurtzel took Irving Cummings' advice and put Janet under contract, he performed a stroke of good business for the Fox organization. When *Seventh Heaven* is released generally, Janet Gaynor will be hailed by the world as a truly great artist. Unlike most of the other young girls who have achieved success in pictures, Janet's talent is greater than her beauty. It is the kind that lasts. It is a safe prediction that she will reign as a favorite when she is playing old woman parts. If the Fox people were long on brains they would realize the fact that to capitalize her ability she should not be seen in too many pictures, certainly in not more than two a year, and that these two should be such extraordinary ones as *Seventh Heaven*. But with a disregard for all business principles that a child might be expected to appreciate, Fox is pursuing the exceptionally stupid course of putting her in productions that have no merit, the one sure method of lessening her box-office value. Before *Seventh Heaven* is released generally *Two Girls Wanted* will be shown in thousands of houses, thus associating Janet's name with cheap and senseless pictures. To those of us who have seen the great *Borzage* production, *Two Girls Wanted* is gratifying, because it reassures us as to the degree of art that Janet can reveal in even a ridiculous part, but as screen entertainment it is about the last word in abso-

lute silliness. It is a sad mixture of grotesque farce, romance, melodrama and rot. It has the framework of what might have been made a passable screen story, but viewed as a vehicle for such an outstanding artist as Janet Gaynor, it is a woeful thing that could not have been made worthy of her ability. It opens with a silly sequence and becomes worse as it progresses. It possibly was selected by one of the University children who occupy such high places in the Fox story counsels, and developed by people whose minds are still more immature. The second time Glenn Tryon sees Janet he proposes to her in a doorway leading from an office, in which half a dozen girls are working, to one in which three men are sitting, making the love scene as devoid of romance as a billiard ball is of hair. A man calling on another to discuss a business deal involving hundreds of thousands of dollars, brings along his niece to meet her fiance, one of the conferees. And after doing such an unheard of thing, he fails to introduce any of the men to the girl, nor does he do anything else to give her visit an air of plausibility. To prevent Tryon being present at a business conference in the morning Ben Bard drugs him the night before, leaving the unconscious hero under the lean limbs of a papier maché tree behind a country club house, a title carefully explaining the exact spot in order that we would not suspect that the bum tree was a little to the left of a livery stable, or perhaps in the rear of a laundry. The acting of Marie Mosquini, Doris Lloyd and Joe Cawthorn are pleasing features of this wholly impossible picture, which by no amount of good acting could be made worthy of Janet Gaynor, as I already have stated. But I suppose Janet is as well off with the Fox organization as she would be with any other. I do not know of any that is conducted in a businesslike manner.

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Great Backgrounds for Idiotic Romance

A CROSS a background of gorgeous mountain scenery Fox has drawn a screen romance that is positively idiotic. Olive Borden stars in it and the introductory sequences present her as an ill-mannered brat unlike anything human that could be developed in the environment that surrounds her. She is extremely insulting to her father's guest without any reason for her conduct being given. The exteriors were shot in the Canadian Rockies and have great pictorial value, although they do not match in beauty those obtained in the same locale by Irving Cummings when he shot *The Country Beyond* for the same producer. For going so far afield to bring beauty to the screen Fox is to be commended, but there is no excuse for such a wildly ridiculous story. It is absurd from the first, but achieves the height of asininity when Olive and Lawrence Gray set out in an airplane, and continues the asininity on an ascending scale to an insane ending. Although the youngest school boy knows that two people in an airplane can not make their voices heard above the roar of the engine, Olive and Gray continue during the flight the utterly senseless quarrel they started when they first met. Even a wreck that compels them to resort to their parachutes does not disturb the continuity of the quarrel, as they continue to jabber at one another until they reach the ground. They fall onto the top of a mountain from which they can escape only by means of a rope ladder which Gray constructs. The time lapse is not indicated, but the impression is given that

the two remain on the mountain for some days, subsisting entirely on a few fish which they catch in a lake which is snuggled up there with them. By giving Olive a hearty spanking Gray makes her love him, which is quite as logical as the rest of the story, and Olive cuts loose the rope ladder in order that she may remain on the top of the mountain for ever and ever with the man she loves, even though she is dressed in pajamas and there is nothing to eat. Pajamas, by the way, is the name of the picture. The girl's father starts out to rescue her. He travels in a canoe, and overlooks the sensible course of having a plane locate the missing couple. Olive and Gray see the rescue party approaching and flee into the forest, as they are quite determined to spend eatless eternities in each others' arms in the chilly embrace of mountain peaks. The rescuers walk briskly into the camp, thus designating it as one that can be climbed to without difficulty, but escape from which is possible only by a rope ladder. They find messages, which the action shows were written in a flowing hand, but which the inserts reveal as neatly printed, stating that the young people don't want to be rescued, and the fadeout shows them sublimely happy among the mountain pines. It is hard to believe, but the fact remains that the fadeout gives the impression that the two intend to stay where they are for the rest of their lives. They have no change of clothing and no food, but even when winter comes with its snows and subzero weather they will be there still, locked in each others' arms, true to that love that came to Olive when Lawrence spanked her. Such a picture as Pajamas is a disgrace to screen art. It is inconceivable that it came from the studio that gave us *Seventh Heaven*.

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"The Country Doctor" Is Very Good Indeed

RUPERT JULIAN strikes a deep, human note in *The Country Doctor*. It is not as good a picture as it might have been, but the faults are those of the script, and not of the direction, for only in a few instances of faulty grouping does Julian in any way offend. In the closing shot his friends gather around the old doctor's wheel chair to show their affection for him. None of them stand in front of him, that position being reserved for the motion picture camera. But we can forgive that display of reverence for movie methods in a picture otherwise so splendidly directed. I suppose I might as well do all my fault finding while I am at it and get it over with. A splendid opportunity to do something notable was missed at the very outset of the film. The first shot reproduces with great beauty that famous picture, "The Doctor", the original of which hangs in the Tate gallery, London, where I viewed it. The screen reproduction impressed me more than the original. Instead of bringing the whole noted picture to life, as soon as movement begins it is shown entirely in close-ups, thereby breaking up the beautiful composition. It would have been a striking screen performance to have shown the entire sequence in a long shot. The storm sequence near the end of the picture is pure hokum, cheap stuff that is out of harmony with the fine note the picture strikes. I imagine it is some studio master mind's conception of production value. I hope that whoever thought of it is pleased so well with it that he will be content to retire on his laurels and never inflict such balderdash on us again. But *The Country Doctor* is

a fine picture. It shows us again what a really capable actor Rudolph Schildkraut is, and the popularity it is attaining throughout the country demonstrates that the old emotions are the best. I have insisted so many times that we need human beings on the screen that it is pleasing to see how well they are received when we get them. Any producer who would give us a series of purely human pictures under such direction as Julian gives *The Country Doctor* would add greatly to his bank account. The fine, healthy spirit that the picture reflects is exactly what the screen needs, and we can thank the De Mille people for giving us at least one sample of it. Sam de Grasse, looking more like President Coolidge than ever, portrays a heavy with his usual great ability. Junior Coghlan again demonstrates what a fine actor he is. The close-up in which he registers the terror caused by the discovery of his mother's body is a masterly bit that would do credit to any adult artist. Jane Keckley, whom I do not remember having seen before, is a fine type. A close-up of her when she sympathizes with the old doctor upon the loss of the position which he coveted is one of the big moments in the picture. I hope this production will get her somewhere. Gladys Brockwell is pleasing in her short part and Virginia Bradford shows promise. I was not much impressed by Frank Marion, the youthful lover. He is too immature. To Schildkraut and Julian goes the greater part of the credit for the agreeable whole. The picture is full of bits that are examples of splendid direction, such as the reluctance of the dog to leave his old master. All through that dog sequence there was a lump in my throat, which was the greatest tribute I could pay it. I hope De Mille will make so much money out of this picture that he will give us more like it.

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Stewart Edward White Has Three Complaints

STEWART EDWARD WHITE, author, philosopher, explorer, big game hunter, and a squire of Hillsboro, a town that has crept beneath the great live oaks near Burlingame and derives huge enjoyment out of being itself, has a picture viewpoint that would be possible only to a man of intelligence who follows a book on philosophy with one dealing with shooting lions in the interior of Africa, both of them written in a charming style that delights the reader who appreciates the good use of English. One would put White down as the kind of man whom pictures would bore, for he is a student still, although a scholar, and brings to the theatre a keener mind than pictures are aimed at. He has lived his own drama; has gone to meet it in wild places where no white man had been before. Four lions charged him at one time in an African jungle. When a lion begins to charge, it's his life or the hunter's, for a live lion never stops. It was up to White to stop all four or be snuffed out himself. He got them, the last one a few feet from the end of the rifle barrel. Reflect on the drama in that, but one incident out of the hundreds that have stirred the existence of the man without taking the gentle tones from his voice or the shyness from his demeanor. With much the same philosophy with which he grants the lion's right to charge him, he grants the screen's right to bore him, a right established by precedent and made inalienable by time. He knows that the romance is going to be developed inadequately, and that all the time honored anachronisms will make their

bows again, consequently he discounts them and enjoys almost any picture. But he has three grievances. One of them is that producers overlook the part that sets play in drama. He thinks sets should be on an ascending scale so as to keep pace with the building drama. He believes that when all sets are of equal magnitude opportunities to accentuate drama are overlooked. There is a lot of merit in White's contention. If the big scene in a picture is staged in the production's most impressive set it will have greater value than would attach to it if the set were but one of a dozen of equal impressiveness. Screen rain storms also intrigue White. Why, he wants to know, must they always be of tropical intensity? There never is a gentle rainfall in the movies, he contends, and never the kind that would occur in the place that it is supposed to. This covers a point in picture criticism that I have overlooked. White is right. There always is a tropical downfall or no rain at all. And at the moment I can not recall a rainfall that was not accompanied by a heavy wind. White's third grievance is the poor punctuation of titles. He does not view it from the standpoint of a stylist in English, a man who sells words and punctuation for a living. He offers the same objection that I have offered scores of times in *The Spectator*: that the layman, who knows nothing about punctuation, can read a title more quickly if it be punctuated in the manner that general reading has accustomed him to. Nothing in the foregoing must be construed as my endorsement of Stewart Edward White as a cribbage player. On the flyleaf of one of his books I have his written acknowledgement that I walloped him at that game.

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Tommyrot About Trend of Public Taste

GRADUALLY I am becoming exasperated with my friend, Ed Schallert. A Sunday Los Angeles Times, purchased on a rainy corner in Tacoma, contains another of Ed's charts which purport to show the drift of public taste. He's as bad as motion picture producers, who go at their business backward. There is no such thing as public taste in the sense that producers view it. Schallert wonders how long war stories will last, what will come after comedy teams, and whether college pictures will be popular. There never was a time when the public wanted or did not want to see a war picture; there has been no feeling for or against comedy teams, and college stories, as such, never have been popular or unpopular. Producers have brought the screen to the lowest level ever reached by a vibrant art through just such follies as imagining that the success of a picture set in a certain environment indicated the drift of public taste towards such environment. King Vidor's *Big Parade* was a success solely because it was a great picture. The fact that it dealt with the war was incidental, and had nothing to do with the picture's success. If this were not true, all pictures dealing with the war would have been equally successful. But our wise producers gave all the credit for the success to the war and began to deal out war pictures which had so little merit that they did not find favor with the public. Whereupon these mental giants declared that the public taste had changed, that war pictures no longer were popular. War pictures could go on forever if they contained the entertainment value that the public is after. The only difficulty in keeping up the pace is that this value

must be on an ascending scale. In the first war picture the environment would interest the public on account of its novelty, and a relatively weak story could get by. By the time the third war picture was viewed the environment would have no longer any entertainment value, and the story would have to stand on its own feet. As long as the stories could do this, just so long would war pictures—or any other kind of pictures—remain popular. If the motion picture industry were manned by people who understood it, it would not be in the mess it is to-day. One would think that those responsible for the mess would arrive at the conclusion that there must be something the matter with the system that produced it. Of course, the producers have their own excuse: that the public taste changes. To get them to realize the truth one must pierce a solid wall of sublime egoism in an effort to reach a brain that isn't there. If they could be taught how to run their business they would dismiss all this public trend rot from their minds and concentrate on the particular story in hand. No matter what subject it deals with, an entertaining story made into a picture that retains its entertaining quality will be a success, and no stupid picture can be successful no matter what its theme or locale is.

* * *

British Films Without Tears

By CEDRIC BELFRAGE

IHATE the idea of the sweet people I have met in Hollywood running their heads into a firm, Old English brick wall. There are offers of tempting proportions coming over from British producers to numbers of people in the Hollywood motion picture business. The advancing tide of culture, or something, is implanting in them a passionate desire to accept these offers. Some players happily wedded to their art here, groan about their position to me in dark corners of the studios, like so many Chekhov characters with their eternal "I want to live—to love," and "When do we go to Moscow?" A few unusual and intelligent pictures have come in from Europe and have apparently produced the impression that any studio in Europe must of necessity be a cradle of Art.

The other day an actress at one of the big studios in Culver City drew me aside, as one cultured person to another, and hoarsed: "I'm stifling here—if you only knew how stifling it is!" The Chekhov heroines who said this generally stifled to death because they could never succeed in raising enough roubles to get to Moscow. It is not the same with motion picture people. They either have or can borrow the fare to anywhere they want to go—and there is nobody to stop them leaving whenever they may be inclined to do so. It is only merciful for one recently emerged from English and European studios to destroy a few common illusions about Art over the Atlantic.

More than sixty films of feature length are now offered to British exhibitors from native studios, or are awaiting trade show. This figure naturally leads outsiders to suppose that a revival has taken place in the prosperity of British production. Actually there has been no such revival, simply because there is no sign of improving quality. Many months of concentrated newspaper publicity for the native producers' woes, by which the English public was informed that it was being Americanized by screen propaganda from Hollywood, produced a forced crop of new capital to bolster up the decrepit local concerns. But the people who were found to put money in the industry saw

their hopes of wealth go the way they have always gone with English pictures—down the drain.

As far as producing good pictures is concerned, England is exactly where she started from. The reason is not capital—for capital is still interested in really sound production enterprise; it is not the weather—for the Riviera is only a few hours away; nor is it studios—for although there is now a scarcity of space there is more than enough room for the handful of competitors, with facilities in several studios equal to Hollywood's.

Back of the whole trouble is the old British cautiousness and conservatism, which makes it impossible for young and new blood to take its proper place in the industry. In England, as in America, the motion picture business attracted at the start a ruffianly and illiterate gang who went into it as a wild gamble because they had failed at everything else. Their gamble was a success, and they stuck, and are still sticking. They have lost investors a pile of money and will lose them plenty more, by present indications, before they are removed. There is still practically no sign of any intelligence and new blood coming into British films.

The difficulty of Hollywood people is that they never see any British pictures, and they are subject to the illusion that English studios are turning out artistic and gentlemanly productions which are far above the heads of the American *hoi polloi*. If I could get hold of a few recent English pictures, produced in the year of grace A. D. 1927, I could give people who have this illusion a good laugh at their own expense. Could they but see the masterpieces of Herbert Wilcox, which were distributed here by Paramount to the few theatres that would show them; the spawnings of Carlyle Blackwell, Harley Knoles and Hayes Hunter, three Americans who work in England because nobody here would give them a job sweeping out the studio; the whimsies of Thomas Bentley and Maurice Elvey, Englishmen who came to Hollywood and made asses of themselves; and the English naval and military epics which are pouring forth ever since the success of *The Big Parade*; could they but see these wonders, they would find plenty of innocent, healthy fun in them.

The last British picture I saw in England was called *Second to None*, and was a big production made last year in co-operation with the English navy. It was shown at one of the most important west-end theatres. The customers of the theatre either took to weeping into their handkerchiefs or rushed out into the street for air. The first part of the picture showed little Oscar in a Fauntleroy suit and little Madeline with ringlets exchanging childish hugs and saying: "I'll mawwy 'oo when I gwows up." Little Oscar joined the navy and had a lot of clean sport with his jolly sailor friends, while Madeline grew into stately womanhood. No sooner had she done this than there appeared a villain with a Kaiser mustache, who threatened to foreclose on the mortgage unless she became his—wife. At this juncture I passed peacefully away in my sleep, so I cannot tell the rest of the story, though perhaps I can hazard a guess at the conclusion.

The last British picture I saw in America was Herbert Wilcox's *Tip Toes*, with Dorothy Gish, which put in an appearance at a ten-cent film parlor on the East Side of New York. Will Rogers was in this production, and contributed a good deal to its general tone of despairing melancholy. It was supposed to be an adaptation of a bright

musical comedy which had no story whatever, but for which British National, the producers, paid an enormous sum against no competition from anyone.

(Mr. Belfrage will discuss this subject further in a subsequent number of *The Spectator*.)

SHOWMANSHIP

By EDWARD J. MONTAGNE
Editor-in-Chief Universal Pictures

THE Showman has always been a necessary part of public entertainment. Whenever you see a big crowd, peek behind the scenes and you will see a great Showman, whether it is a Tex Rickard, a David Belasco, or an Aimee McPherson. As soon as our pet industry took on sufficient size to be worthy of his attention, the Showman made his advent into motion pictures, and with his advent bigger and better theatres began to be built.

On the exhibition end, men like Rothapfel and Grauman were the first big showmen to attract attention. By the building of luxurious theatres, by the introduction of cushioned seats, high class musical programmes, and colorful prologues, they lifted the quality of motion pictures. Not that the pictures were actually better, but audiences began to think they were better because they were viewing them under more favorable circumstances. The new audiences created for cinema entertainment were of a higher class than the old "store" crowd; more intelligent and discriminating people, who eventually demanded a high class of picture, and soon the Showman came ambling along to look after the production end.

The old producers, bewildered by the turn of events, accommodatingly stepped back, and younger and more progressive men moved up to take their places. The only producers who survived this revolution were those who were natural-born showmen, men who welcomed the new era because it gave them a broader and more attractive field to work in.

Carl Laemmle was always one of the greatest showmen in pictures. He forced his way into the already trustified industry by the showmanship he displayed in making his first pictures. His fortune was founded on the brilliant and daring showmanship exhibited in the making and handling of the first Broadway run picture, *Traffic in Souls*. Follow his career and you will find in everything that he does an almost uncanny knowledge of the pulse of the people, which is real showmanship.

Turn whichever way you wish and wherever you see a successful man or woman in this industry, you must bow your head to superb showmanship. Why has Cecil de Mille come to the top as a director and producer? Because in addition to his natural gifts for creation, he is a master showman. He knows the hearts of the people, he keeps abreast of the times, he gives them just what they want. Do you recall the "million dollar" bathrooms in his society pictures for Famous years ago? Do you recall those novel, bizarre sets, which you remembered long after you had forgotten the picture itself? Clever, almost inspired showmanship.

The Showman is here to stay in this industry. The director who wishes to survive must put more showmanship into his pictures. He must realize that the year is 1927, he must study the audiences of 1927, feel them, know them, and photograph his subjects for them. The public attitude towards big themes changes from day to day, and the

director who is able to catch the mood of a present-day audience is certainly going to come closer to hitting the box-office bull's eye than the fellow who is doing his job in the same way that he did it ten years ago.

All along the line, from the director down to the humblest employee the showman is the one who will eventually survive.

Writers must shake off the cobwebs, or take a back seat. As our economic life changes, new themes present themselves, and new viewpoints take the place of old ones. Witness the change of public opinion on the World War in just a few years. We must pull at the heart strings in the same old way, we must not neglect the tear ducts, we cannot forget that people still want to laugh—the tricks are not to be forgotten—but in heaven's name let us change our background and our characters, and our motivation now and then. Separations are not always tragedies. Sometimes separations eventually bring people together into closer relationship, with better understanding and greater love. Yet authors will invariably strive for stark tragedies when treating the divorce theme. Witness *Silk Stockings* for a modern treatment of the perplexing divorce problem.

The old hackneyed plot, told in the same hackneyed way, is gone forever. The audience is ahead of you. They are fading out before you have ended your first reel. Audiences demand new themes or at least a new treatment of the old ones. Authors must discard the good old stereotyped characters which have done service so long and put new ones on the screen. The radio announcer might have a family somewhere and a few troubles of his own. He is at least more refreshing than the artificial man-about-town with the Filipino valet and perfumed apartment. There is romance in the life of the little girl who runs the elevator in your office building. Why must it always be a chorus girl or a stenographer, when we tell the story of the working girl?

This is what I mean by showmanship; bringing your story right up to date, putting on the screen new characterizations, in fresh and different backgrounds.

As the writer must keep pace with the years, so must everybody else who contributes in any way to the making of a motion picture. The film editor must feel the tempo of his audience, in order to get the tempo of his picture. The photographer must display his showmanship in the new effects he can obtain. The technical directors should forget the one, two, three locations and sets in their notebooks, and strike out in new pastures. The actors and actresses should study life instead of trying to remember the bag of tricks of somebody else.

Long live the Showman! Without him entertainment would be a very dull and monotonous thing.

THE UNIT SYSTEM

By MARY O'HARA

I HAVE set forth, in two previous articles, a method for injecting into pictures a larger quantity of artistic merit; the simple and logical procedure being to have pictures made from beginning to end by people possessed of the necessary four talents, namely: writer, playwright, director, and photographic artist. And I finished by saying that this would naturally lead to a revival of the unit system.

Upon a successful establishment of the unit system, each

unit made up of the people who really ought to be making pictures—with the logical man or woman at the head of the unit—I base my greatest hopes for the future of pictures.

To begin with, the other method, the factory or department method, is impossible. Let us examine it.

In a certain studio, run, let us say, by Mr. X, fifty pictures are to be made in a year. He puts the production of these fifty pictures into the hands of three supervisors whom he considers efficient. The Spectator makes no bones about stating that most of these supervisors are inefficient and do not know their business. Whether that is so or not is of little importance, because even if they were—even if they were gods or super-men—they could not give the necessary attention and supervision to so many pictures. They are cruelly driven by the necessities of their positions and they suffer in health and general outlook. Their pictures suffer, too—likewise everyone who comes in contact with them. I believe that most of these men live on the ragged edge of suspense, insecurity and dread. To cover this up, they assume an amazing arrogance and pride, some of which may be genuine—as human beings have great ability in the art of kidding themselves—but most of which is very shaky. By means of it they pass on to those who labor under them their own anxiety, misery and dread. This horrible uneasiness is the universal atmosphere in which pictures are made. The trouble of one is the trouble of all, since all the activities of the studio impinge upon each other. Everybody's finger is in everybody's pie. A story is shifted from one writer to the other until it seems to the supervisor that sufficient attention has been given it to make it likely

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that it is ready for production. Why the last opinion is better than the first or the third it is difficult to say. It is beyond doubt true that many a picture goes into production just because everyone is tired of milling over it—argument has exhausted itself—it ought to be right by this time if it isn't—at least no one could say that sufficient effort has not been expended—start shooting!

Now a picture is a creature of the most delicate adjustments. It needs to be as profoundly, as intimately understood as a child. Some one should have memorized it before production starts. Someone should know why a certain scene—perhaps a small and ineffective scene—of all scenes, must be most perfectly put over; someone should be holding in his mind every scene of the picture, every foot of it, and what is more, the meaning and the significance of every scene to the picture as a whole—before and while it is being shot. That someone is, presumably, the supervisor. But as things are now, can he do that? Can he give it even a portion of such attention as that? Can he even honestly and fairly be said to supervise it? He can not. He does not attempt it. That is not what he understands by supervision. How much can he do—does he do? He chooses a story which he likes. He chooses a writer whose work he likes. If he has no special favorite, he tries one, or two, or three—and himself gives general directions for combining them into a single whole. He is doing, almost always, several pictures at a time. He is interviewing actors, seeing rushes of the two or three pictures which are in production, supervising the editing of pictures which have been finished. He is almost always oppressed and worried by some one picture which is turning out badly or hopelessly; he is trying to improve it—to doctor it—torn between the hope of rescuing it from “the shelf” and the fear of throwing good money after bad. Over each picture he does manage to throw, it is true a vestige of his own color, his own taste, but only a vestige. In one picture, the subject, or certain angles, or scenes, or titles, or twists, may be really his. The rest is anybody's. All of that careful, responsible watching of every inch of the picture is relegated—to whom? Officially to nobody, because he is the supervisor. But the director assumes that responsibility. Moreover, the writer assumes it, too. The regrettable conflict between directors and writers has grown from this exact cause. Things are going wrong with the picture! Whose fault is it? Whose responsibility? What is to be done? The only thing is to inform the supervisor. This means a “conference”. Sometimes it takes days to get a conference with that busy supervisor, who perhaps at this exact time is suffering the tortures of the damned in conference with his boss, the producer, over the failure of some past picture, over excessive production costs, or what have you. Meanwhile the picture stands still! Money pouring out! Eventually the supervisor decides the point at issue, perhaps the director's way, perhaps the writer's way, perhaps his own way. Often in these conferences, held always under terrible pressure of time, there is no real meeting of minds. The trouble is not clearly set forth, understood, thrashed out and adjusted; it is merely decided. And the supervisor hurries on to his next worry.

In my opinion, one-man-supervision of eighteen or twenty pictures a year—or even a dozen, or eight, is a job that simply can not be well done. The pictures actually go without the supervision they need. In a certain pe-

culiar sense, this is recognized and admitted, because supervisors are not actually held responsible for the pictures. It is as if the producer sets them an impossible job, and when they fail, and blame someone else—writer, or director, or story, or star—their excuse is accepted to a certain extent. So few good pictures are made that producers seem to take it for granted that it is an almost impossible thing to achieve. There has to be perfect performance and co-operation on the part of so many people that it is almost certain that someone will misbehave and spoil the picture. If the producer should say, “But you are the supervisor. Why did you permit this?” the supervisor can answer, “Well, it was so and so who did it—you know what a big name he has—I expected him to know his business—”, etc.

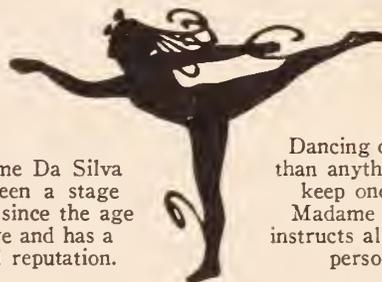
Passing the buck! Alibis! Pictures are made of them. That is, bad pictures. When a triumph comes forth, how eager is a supervisor to claim, “I did it!”

One can't begrudge it to them. They have so few triumphs.

With the unit system this could not occur. Responsibility would be placed beyond any argument. What a relief this should be to the producer!

One other point against the “factory” system. To whatever extent those three men do impose their own minds and opinions upon the studio output, to that extent the pictures are brought to a distressing uniformity. Is the creation of pictures different to the creation of any other artistic product? Sculpture? Painting? Music? Different composers, for instance, Debussy, Grieg or Beetho-

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ven, have such definite and individual styles that in listening to their music one instantly recognizes the composer. But with pictures—is there any cry more frequently heard than that “pictures are all alike?”

If the unit system were developed to the full extent of its possibilities, different styles of picture-making would appear. A certain unit would discover a talent for making fantasies. Another, farces and comedies, another authentic historical films, another religious or metaphysical works, and of course the majority, fiction and drama. Original ideas would have free scope. There would be competition between the various units to discover fresh and interesting angles. In fact, there would be doubtless many freak pictures. I imagine that Mr. X. and all of his ilk would sometimes tear their hair when they saw pictures of their very own studio saying strange things that have not been said in pictures before and saying them in new ways, different from the ways they have become so comfortably familiar with. Personally, I would walk a mile to see a freak picture; but as I do not believe it would be generally acceptable to the public, I would not recommend it for production. Inter-unit competition, aiming at box-office as well as artistic success, would discourage abnormalities while encouraging originality.

I do not see how it can be denied that the unit system is in theory the right one. It can be argued that it has been tried and bad pictures turned out; that it is in use here and there and not doing better work than where a few men govern an immense output. But that does not mean that the system is wrong. It simply means that the wrong men are at the head of the units. Mr. X. being a business man himself, and not an artist, feels that when he has found another good business man to place at the head of his unit, he has done just what should be done to insure success. Upon that fallacy rests the failure of the unit system up to date. A good business man can attend to business; he can arrange schedules; hire and fire; contract for sets, actors, props and what-nots; but he can not decide what ought and what ought not to go into the picture.

This brings me to another topic, namely, the unit supervisor, with which I will deal in another article.

“People vs. M. P. Director”

By HARRY O. HOYT

(The following is a transcript from a local police court record.)

Judge Beaton: “I am ready to listen to the arguments of the counsel.”

Prosecuting Attorney Hays: “If it please Your Honor, I think it is foolish for me to talk”—(Cries of “Hear! Hear!” from the Spectators) “that is, I think it unnecessary.”

Judge Beaton: “Suits me perfectly!”

P. A. Hays: “There lie against this defendant seven charges. First, you have heard the author testify that he did write a story that in every way was a perfect and lovely thing. It had in it that freshness which could come only from youthful genius. It had thematically the strength of Gibraltar. It had characters winnowed from life. It had action fresh and unhackneyed and plot that left his friends to whom he read it searching the dictionary for adjectives with which to describe its superlative qualities.

“You have heard him say, Your Honor, that the theme may have been as strong as the Rock itself, but that was no insurance. That dummies have been substituted for his flesh and blood characters, that the action was reduced to Formula C1267 and K11, and that the plot could best be described in the words of his eight-year-old son who in seeing the picture for the first time remarked: ‘Daddy, those weren’t the names of the characters the last time we saw this picture’.

“Your Honor, you have heard the cameraman testify that if he had not given him the lighting and set-ups he did, the defendant would have been out of a job after the first day’s rushes.

“You have heard the supervisor say that the defendant didn’t know what it was all about and he would have fired him and directed the picture himself but he had a couple of other companies to handle and could not find the time.

“And the cast has sworn on oath that the defendant didn’t know an entrance from an exit—that they directed themselves and suggested dozens of original bits of business which the director in his stupidity discarded.

“The Film Editor has told you that were it not for his ability at trick-cutting they could not have put the picture together at all.

“The title writer’s sworn statement was that he saved the picture with a knockout set of titles.

“And finally, the producer on the stand has testified that the defendant imagined he was making a picture for the Government and that all he had to do was to unlock the mint and take what he wanted and spend it. That it was his certain belief while they were away on location the defendant spent his time skipping dollars on the water.

“I ask, Your Honor, in view of this testimony, that you sentence him for life on every count and make the terms run consecutively.”

(Applause and cries of “Hear! Hear!” from the Spectators.)

D. A. Hazelhurst, for the Defendant: “Your Honor, we have placed but one witness on the stand and that is the defendant’s assistant—as he knows practically everything. Other witnesses were unnecessary.

“You have heard him tell you that while reading the ‘Odyssey’ in the original Greek the other night he ran across the plot that the author used. He quoted to prove that Cervantes, Schiller, Dostoievski, De Maurier, and Shakespeare subsequently borrowed this plot for their own use.

“He has sworn that the cameraman thought the camera was some kind of a puzzle to be taken apart and put to-

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gether. That the supervisor couldn't pronounce words of more than two syllables and didn't know what script was being shot as he hadn't read it.

"That the Cast imagined this picture was being produced for experimental purposes to assist them in trying out various make-ups and costumes and expected to be paid for being taught how to act. He has told you that the Film Editor came from a ribbon counter and all he knew was footage.

"That the title writer had cut up a copy of Joe Miller's joke book and kept the pieces in a bag from which he drew at random for the titles. That the producer squawked every time a location lunch ran over ten cents and charged the company a hundred dollars a day for his Rolls Royce when they could have rented a good car for ten dollars.

"That the defendant to his certain knowledge worked on an average of twenty-two hours a day; was a master dramatist; as an actor that Broadway was waiting for him with open arms—and above all, he had never known him to make a mistake in his life.

"With this categorical denial by the man who knows the defendant best, we rest our case."

Judge Beaton: "How about the punctuation of the titles?"

P. A. Hays: "They are good motion picture form."

D. A. Hazelhurst: "I object. The counsel for the State hasn't qualified as a motion picture expert."

P. A. Hays: "Well, I have letters praising—"

Judge Beaton: "I shall have someone see this picture and then I'll write my opinion."

Defendant: "Please, You Honor, can I say a word?"

Judge Beaton: "You may—I don't know if you can."

Defendant: "The picture made a million dollar profit."

Judge Beaton: "What! A million dollar profit? Then my course is clear—I sentence the people to be hung!"

GEORGE NICHOLLS

During the last year or two the scythe of death has hewn a large swath in the ranks of the motion picture industry. The latest of the old timers to cross the divide is George Nicholls, one of the men who has stood by pictures since their inception, and who has striven to uphold their best traditions. Nicholls directed the first eight of Charlie Chaplin's original pictures and the first twelve of Roscoe Arbuckle's. He was instrumental in giving James Cruze and Erich von Stroheim their first chance in the industry, and he also directed in the early days such people as Kathlyn Williams, Seena Owen, Edwin Carewe, William Russell, Lew Cody and Earl Foxe. His own last appearances were in *White Gold*, directed by William Howard, and von Stroheim's *Wedding March*, which has yet to be released. His characterizations, similar to those of George Fawcett, were mainly of sympathetic fathers, such as the old miner in *White Flannels*, opposite Louise Dresser, a typical part which, with its subtle flashes of humor, endeared him to his audiences. For the past five months George Nicholls has been gamely fighting for his life, but the odds against him were too strong. His last request was that he should not be forgotten, a request which, if he can look back through the veil, he will see is granted without question in the minds and hearts of those who have known and loved pictures since they first flickered across the crude little screens of the world fifteen or so years ago.

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STORY OF THE BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

Since the original story of the box-office was published in the August 6th issue of The Spectator and the ratings of the individual personnel of the industry in the following issue, many new pictures have been released and many new box-office figures have been received. Thus we are publishing new rating lists not only on pictures but also on supervisors, directors, writers, stars and featured players. Due to limited space it is impossible to cover the personnel of the entire industry. So, in this issue we are only publishing the sixty top-notchers of each division.

In the listing of the pictures we have rated the fourteen road shows in order of the biggest grossers and the greatest length of run. What Price Glory has advanced most rapidly and now occupies the position of the second best money-maker. Many sincere critics, as well as people in the industry, are of the opinion that The Big Parade's being released first took the edge off of the box-office value of What Price Glory, at the same time claiming that the latter picture is equally good, and some say even better.

Old Ironsides, now playing tenth among the road-shows, continues to be the prize flop. The four road-shows listed below Old Ironsides, namely The Garden of Allah, Les Miserables, The Student Prince and Sunrise, have just started their runs in the last week or two and so it is rather hard to determine just yet how well they will stand up.

Since we published the last rating list two New York road-shows, When a Man Loves and Annie Laurie, have been withdrawn and placed on the box-office list as they are now generally released. John Barrymore's follow-up on Don Juan has not held up as well as expected and it has dropped to 91 per cent. capacity, and yet it has fared much better than his first United Artists' release The Beloved Rogue, which only held to 85 per cent. capacity business. Annie Laurie is holding fairly well at 86 per cent, but it is really too early to say just how well this picture will line up at the box-office.

The most remarkable thing about the road-show list is that while Vidor's Big Parade heads the list—as this is the only production that has grossed over \$7,000,000, \$2,000,000 of which was taken in at one theatre—it was also the least expensive to produce. Congratulations, and more power to King Vidor and his associates.

SUPERVISORS

Our supervisors' rating list has many new names in this listing. However there were several supervisors on whom we were unable to get sufficient dope and figures before. Also two new releases have brought forth the names of two new supervisors.

These are College, 79 per cent., supervised by Harry Brand for Joe Schenck, and Service for Ladies, 80 per cent., supervised by Barney Glazer for Paramount.

Joe Schenck can be very thankful that he made Harry Brand supervisor on the Buster Keaton unit. Previous to College Keaton had been running his own show, which resulted in two of the worst flops Buster has appeared in,—namely Battling Butler and The General. Brand's supervision of the Keaton unit has brought him back to the box-office stronger than ever and right at the very critical moment, for if Buster had produced a third con-

secutive flop he would have been out in the cold.

Barney Glazer's supervision of the Adolphe Menjou unit has been quite successful, as Service for Ladies has been doing quite good business. Glazer, who has just completed a very successful supervision of Emil Jannings' last production, The Street of Sin, evidently is not very crazy about supervising pictures as he is now confining his attention solely to writing.

Sol Wurtzel, whose title reads general superintendent of the William Fox West Coast studios, has evidently noticed how successful the supervising system has been at the United Artists,

PRODUCTIONS

	Per cent.		Per cent.
1 Big Parade.....Road Show		12 Hula	97
2 What Price Glory " "		13 La Boheme	96
3 Ben Hur " "		14 For Heaven's Sake.....	96
4 Don Juan " "		15 Night of Love.....	95
5 King of Kings.....		16 Behind the Front.....	94
6 Beau Geste.....		17 Camille	94
7 Seventh Heaven.....		18 Volga Boatman.....	93
8 Wings " "		19 Sea Beast.....	83
9 Patent L'ther Kid " "		20 Bardelys	92
10 Old Ironsides.....		21 Better 'Ole.....	91
11 Garden of Allah.....		22 Temptress.....	91
12 Les Miserables.....		23 Annie Roomie.....	91
13 Student Prince.....		24 Magic Flame.....	91
14 Sunrise.....		25 When a Man Loves.....	91
	Per cent.	26 Quarterback.....	91
1 Son of the Sheik.....	111	27 Barbara Worth.....	90
2 Freshman.....	110	28 Unknown.....	90
3 Black Pirate.....	105	29 Dark Angel.....	90
4 Flesh and the Devil.....	105	30 Four Horsemen (re-issue)	90
5 We're in the Navy Now.....	103	31 Lady Windemere's Fan..	90
6 Kid Brother.....	102	32 Mr. Wu.....	89
7 Tell It to the Marines.....	100	33 Mare Nostrum.....	89
8 Merry Widow.....	100	34 Fireman Save My Child..	88
9 Stella Dallas.....	100	35 Fine Manners.....	88
10 Underworld.....	100		
11 It.....	99		
		36 Eagle.....	88
		27 Resurrection.....	87
		38 Kiki.....	87
		39 McFadden's Flats.....	87
		40 Annie Laurie.....	86
		41 Scarlet Letter.....	86
		42 Twelve Miles Out.....	86
		43 Naughtly But Nice.....	86
		44 Way of All Flesh.....	86
		45 Sorrows of Satin.....	85
		46 Unholy Three.....	85
		47 Three Faces East.....	85
		48 Three Bad Men.....	85
		49 Missing Link.....	85
		50 Valencia.....	85
		51 Campus Flirt.....	85
		52 Ace of Cads.....	85
		53 Beloved Rogue.....	85
		54 Irene.....	85
		55 Cobens and Kellys.....	84
		56 Casey at the Bat.....	84
		57 Men of Steel.....	84
		58 Hotel Imperial.....	83
		59 Mantrap.....	83
		60 Mockery.....	82

WRITERS

	Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.
1 Fred De Gresac.....	100	21 Forest Halsey.....	80	41 Julien Josephson.....	76
2 Bess Meredith.....	93	22 Chandler Sprague.....	80	42 Willis Goldbeck.....	76
3 Laurence Stallings.....	91	23 Jack Cunningham.....	80	43 Darryl F. Zanuck.....	76
4 Harry Behn.....	91	24 June Mathis.....	80	44 Al Cohn.....	76
5 Monty Brice.....	91	25 Jeannie McPherson.....	79	45 Chas. Logue.....	76
6 Frances Marion.....	90	26 Jules Furthman.....	79	46 Paul Bern.....	75
7 John McDermott.....	87	27 Luther Reed.....	78	47 Josephine Lovett.....	75
8 Lenore Coffee.....	86	28 Ray Harris.....	78	48 C. Gardner Sullivan.....	75
9 Dorothy Farnum.....	86	29 A. P. Younger.....	78	49 Adelaide Heilbron.....	75
10 Elliott Clawson.....	85	30 Carey Wilson.....	78	50 Becky Gardiner.....	75
11 Hans Kralay.....	84	31 Channing Pollock.....	77	51 J. Shelby Hamilton.....	75
12 Ben Glazer.....	84	32 Ben Hecht.....	77	52 Byron Morgan.....	75
13 John Russell.....	84	33 Lorna Moon.....	77	53 Sam Mintz.....	75
14 Ted Browning.....	84	34 Pierre Collings.....	77	54 Agnes Christine Johnson	75
15 Winifred Dunn.....	84	35 Lloyd Corrigan.....	77	55 Arthur Ripley.....	74
16 H. Loring, L. Lighton.....	84	36 Roland West.....	77	56 James O'Donohue.....	74
17 Waldemar Young.....	82	37 Charles Furthman.....	77	57 Douglas Furber.....	74
18 E. Richard Shayer.....	81	38 Elinor Glynn.....	77	58 J. Franklin Poland.....	74
19 Louise Long.....	80	40 Paul Schofield.....	77	59 Byron Morgan.....	74
20 Ethel Dougherty.....	80			60 Jas. Ashmore Creelman.....	74

DIRECTORS

	Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.
1 King Vidor.....	100	21 Frank Borzage.....	80	41 Rex Ingram.....	77
2 Fred Niblo.....	97	22 Herbert Brenon.....	80	42 Alex. Korda.....	76
3 Clarence Brown.....	92	23 John Robertson.....	80	43 Hobart Henley.....	76
4 Cecil B. de Mille.....	91	24 Joseph von Sternberg.....	80	44 Frank Lloyd.....	76
5 Geo. FitzMaurice.....	90	25 Will Nigh.....	80	45 Frank Strayer.....	76
6 Eddie Sutherland.....	88	26 Mal St. Clair.....	79	46 Monty Bell.....	76
7 Allan Crosland.....	88	27 Roland West.....	79	47 Jack Conway.....	76
8 Henry King.....	86	28 Harry Pollard.....	79	48 Sam Taylor.....	76
9 Ernst Lubitsch.....	86	29 D. W. Griffith.....	78	49 Richard Rosson.....	76
10 Von Stroheim.....	85	30 Edwin Carewe.....	78	50 E. A. Dupont.....	76
11 Tod Browning.....	84	31 Al Santell.....	78	51 Al Parker.....	75
12 Victor Seastrom.....	83	32 Henry d'Arrast.....	78	52 Jack Ford.....	75
13 R. A. Walsh.....	83	33 Luther Reed.....	78	53 Sam Wood.....	74
14 Mauritz Stiller.....	83	34 Chuck Reisner.....	78	54 Art Rosson.....	74
15 Victor Flemming.....	83	35 Monty Brice.....	78	55 Eddie Cline.....	74
16 Clarence Badger.....	82	36 F. W. Murnau.....	77	56 Al Green.....	74
17 James Cruze.....	82	37 Richard Wallace.....	77	57 Benj. Chistiansen.....	74
18 Syd Franklin.....	81	38 Billy Wellman.....	77	58 Howard Hawks.....	74
19 Millard Webb.....	81	39 Allan Dwan.....	77	59 Bill Howard.....	74
20 Fritz Lang.....	81	40 Bill Beaudine.....	77	60 Ed. Sedgewick.....	74

M.-G.-M. and First National Studios, and has appointed three supervisors at his plant, with more to follow upon the arrival of Winnie Sheehan from New York next week. The three appointed so far are Kenneth Hawks, Phillip Klein and William Conselman.

B. P. Schulberg has made several changes in his supervising system at the Paramount studios and mostly for the worse. Besides Barney Glazer having discontinued supervising, Ralph Block and Lucien Hubbard have both resigned their positions as supervisors. Since Block and Hubbard have both very good box-office ratings it was very poor policy on the part of Schulberg to allow these two experts to get away from the Paramount fold, and it was still worse to appoint a man with such a poor box-office record as J. B. Bachman as supervisor on the Emil Jannings' unit just because Bachman was a very good personal friend of his. Lloyd Sheldon, 80 per cent., and

Louis Lighton, 75 per cent, are both continuing to supervise four Paramount units, with Hector Turnbull and Milton Hoffman supervising special units.

The newest addition to the Schulberg supervisor's system is Bennie Zeidman, 75 per cent., who was formerly with the John Barrymore company and who will now supervise the Richard Dix and Zane Gray pictures for Paramount.

One of the most rapid advances on the supervisor's list is Irving Thalberg's right-hand man, Bernie Hyman. His two recent box-office hits, Slide Kelly Slide, 77 per cent., and Twelve Miles Out, 86 per cent., have both registered exceptionally well, bringing his average up from 71 to 76 per cent.

DIRECTORS

Several new releases have both raised and lowered the standings of many of our most prominent directors.

STARS		STARS		STARS		
	Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Chas. Chaplin.....	100	25 Buster Keaton.....	78	50 Dorothy Gish.....	70	
2 Douglas Fairbanks.....	100	26 Ramon Navarro.....	78	51 Rod La Rocque.....	70	
3 Harold Lloyd.....	100	27 Richard Barthelmess.....	77	52 Jetta Goudal.....	70	
4 Rudolph Valentino.....	96	28 Pola Negri.....	77	53 Laura La Plante.....	68	
5 John Barrymore.....	94	29 Mae Murray.....	76	54 Geo. Jessel.....	68	
6 Norma Talmadge.....	93	30 Constance Talmadge.....	75	55 Geo. Bancroft.....	68	
7 Lon Chaney.....	90	31 Douglas McLean.....	74	56 Leatrice Joy.....	68	
8 Clara Bow.....	88	32 Corinne Griffith.....	74	57 Jackie Coogan.....	67	
9 Wallace Beery.....	87	33 Milton Sills.....	74	58 Marie Prevost.....	67	
10 John Gilbert.....	86	34 Thomas Meighan.....	74	59 Norman Kerry.....	67	
11 Greta Garbo.....	86	35 Billie Dove.....	74	60 W. C. Fields.....	67	
12 Lillian Gish.....	86	36 Harry Langdon.....	73	61 Wm. Boyd.....	67	
13 Ronald Colman.....	85	37 Reginald Denny.....	73	62 Irene Rich.....	67	
14 Colleen Moore.....	84	38 Charlie Murray.....	73	63 Geo. O'Brien.....	66	
15 Syd Chaplin.....	82	39 Dolores Del Rio.....	73	64 Mae McAvoy.....	66	
16 Richard Dix.....	81	40 Gilda Gray.....	73	65 Janet Gaynor.....	66	
17 Mary Pickford.....	81	41 Florence Vidor.....	73	66 Phyllis Haver.....	66	
18 Emil Jannings.....	81	42 Esther Ralston.....	72	67 Viola Dana.....	66	
19 Marion Davies.....	80	43 Ray Griffith.....	72	68 Luisa Fazenda.....	65	
20 Vilma Banky.....	80	44 Wm. Haines.....	72	69 Vera Reynolds.....	64	
21 Adolphe Menjou.....	80	45 Dolores Costello.....	72	70 Joseph Schildkraut.....	63	
22 Gloria Swanson.....	80	46 Raymond Hatton.....	71	71 Johnny Hines.....	63	
23 Bebe Daniels.....	79	47 Madge Bellamy.....	70	72 Monty Banks.....	61	
24 Norma Shearer.....	79	48 Monte Blue.....	70	73 Warner Oland.....	59	
		49 Eddie Cantor.....	70			

FEATURED PLAYERS		FEATURED PLAYERS		FEATURED PLAYERS	
	Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.
1 Antonio Moreno.....	69	21 Geo. Sydney.....	65	41 Belle Bennett.....	64
2 Joan Crawford.....	67	22 Alice Terry.....	65	42 Alma Reubens.....	63
3 Jack Mulhall.....	67	23 Ches. Conklin.....	65	43 Eleanor Boardman.....	63
4 Lois Moran.....	67	24 Lawrence Gray.....	65	44 Claire Windsor.....	63
5 Renee Adoree.....	67	25 Victor MacLagen.....	65	45 Blanche Sweet.....	63
6 Lew Cody.....	67	26 Edmund Lowe.....	65	46 Glenn Tryon.....	63
7 Clive Brook.....	67	27 Pauline Starke.....	65	47 Red Grange.....	63
8 Dorothy Mackaill.....	66	28 Sally O'Neil.....	65	48 Gary Cooper.....	63
9 Charlie Ray.....	66	29 Lon Errol.....	64	49 Jean Hersholt.....	63
10 Louise Dresser.....	66	30 Chas. Farrell.....	64	50 Lilyan Tashman.....	63
11 Lloyd Hughes.....	66	31 Aileen Pringle.....	64	51 Buster Clifton.....	63
12 Mary Astor.....	66	32 Betty Bronson.....	64	52 Marion Nixon.....	63
13 Noah Beery.....	66	33 Ricardo Cortez.....	64	53 Jack Holt.....	63
14 Lars Hansen.....	66	34 Ford Sterling.....	64	54 Zasu Pitts.....	62
15 Louise Brooks.....	66	35 Lya De Putti.....	64	55 Alice Joyce.....	62
16 Ernest Torrence.....	66	36 Neil Hamilton.....	64	56 Conway Tearle.....	62
17 Evelyn Brent.....	66	37 Conrad Nagel.....	64	57 Ken Maynard.....	62
18 Lewis Stone.....	66	38 Mary Brian.....	64	58 Ben Lyon.....	62
19 Geo. K. Arthur.....	66	39 Lois Wilson.....	64	59 Warner Baxter.....	62
20 James Hall.....	66	40 Betty Compson.....	64	60 Estelle Taylor.....	62

SUPERVISORS		SUPERVISORS		SUPERVISORS		
	Per cent.		Per cent.		Per cent.	
1 Irving Thalberg.....	89	18 Harry Brand.....	76	36 Ray Schrock.....	70	
2 John Considine Jr.....	88	19 Bernie Hyman.....	75	37 Bertram Milhauser.....	70	
3 Sam Goldwyn.....	88	20 Eph. Asher.....	75	38 Sam Rork.....	68	
4 Ben Schulberg.....	81	21 Louis Lighton.....	75	39 Robert Kane.....	68	
5 Winnie Sheehan.....	80	22 Bennie Zeidman.....	75	40 Sol Wurtzel.....	68	
6 Lloyd Sheldon.....	80	23 Bill Jenner.....	74	41 J. D. Williams.....	68	
7 Ralph Block.....	79	24 Harry Cohn.....	73	42 Frank Griffin.....	68	
8 Eric Pommer.....	79	25 Bernie Fineman.....	73	43 Earl Hudson.....	68	
9 Al Rockett.....	79	26 C. Gardiner Sullivan.....	72	44 Jack Coogan Sr.....	68	
10 Hector Turnbull.....	79	27 J. Boyce Smith.....	72	45 June Mathis.....	67	
11 Jack Warner.....	78	28 Darryl Zanuck.....	72	46 F. McGrew Willis.....	67	
12 Julian Johnston.....	78	29 Hunt Stromberg.....	71	47 Mike Levee.....	67	
13 Ben Glazer.....	78	30 Henry Henington.....	71	48 Ray Rockett.....	67	
14 Lucien Hubbard.....	78	31 Charlie Rogers.....	71	49 Wild Gunning.....	65	
15 John McCormack.....	77	32 Al Christie.....	70	50 C. C. Burr.....	63	
16 Carey Wilson.....	77	33 Joe Engle.....	70	51 Harry "Joe" Brown.....	62	
17 Wm. le Baron.....	76	34 Henry Hobart.....	70	52 J. G. Bachman.....	59	
		35 Eddie Montaigne.....	70			

Among the new directors whose names were not published before due to lack of recent releases are Joe von Sternberg, 80 per cent., Henry D'Arrast, 78 per cent., Alexander Korda, 76 per cent., and Benjamin Christiansen, 74 per cent.

Although Ben Schulberg has made quite a few bad moves recently with his supervising system, he has done very well with his directorial staff. Four of Paramount's ace directors, namely Maurice Stiller, 83 per cent., Joe von Sternberg, 80 per cent., Harry D'Arrast, 78 per cent., and Billy Wellman, 77 per cent., were all previously employed by M.-G.-M., and yet not one of them had a single box-office picture to his credit under the Thalberg regime. Stiller was withdrawn from The Temptress after the picture was three weeks in production and his contract cancelled. D'Arrast was on the M.-G.-M. lot for almost a year and was never given an opportunity to do anything, and both Joe von Sternberg and Wellman made two of M.G.M.'s 1925 prize-flop pictures, The Exquisite Sinner and The Boob, respectively.

Von Sternberg's career is particularly interesting. Following his bad break with M.-G.-M., he moved his megaphone to Charles Chaplin's studio where he directed Edna Purviance in The Seagull. But Chaplin evidently did not think very much of this picture for he never released it. Production experts seemed to think that Schulberg was taking a great risk when he placed von Sternberg under contract to write and direct for Paramount. Yet his Underworld has turned out to be the biggest money-maker on the 1927 Paramount program. Von Sternberg can now be classed with the many other successful directors who have been promoted from the ranks of the cutting-room.

Harry D'Arrast, like Monta Bell, is a Charles Chaplin protege, for he also served as an aide to the great genius on his sophisticated drama, A Woman of Paris, featuring Adolphe Menjou. After wasting a lot of time on the M.-G.-M. lot D'Arrast finally met Menjou again and was given a chance to direct him in Service for Ladies, which has just been released, and, as previously mentioned, is quite a decided box-office success. D'Arrast has just completed directing Menjou in A Gentleman of Paris and has again been so successful that Schulberg has assigned him permanently to the Menjou unit.

WRITERS

According to the letters, wires and 'phone calls we have been receiving our writers' ratings seem to be creating the most disturbance in the picture colony. Accordingly I have been very careful in selecting the sixty most successful box-office writers and have gone over each individual's past releases and checked the figures on them.

The overwhelming success of Underworld has brought in two new names with very high box-office ratings. They are Robert Lee, who wrote the

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continuity, and Charlie Furthman, who wrote the adaptation.

Chandler Sprague, a noted ex-newspaper man, who joined the film colony not so long ago, is also coming into much prominence as a box-office writer. He wrote the adaptation of Service for Ladies and Camille.

June Mathis' last script before she passed on, The Magic Flame, has raised her rating considerably, as this picture is doing good business. Miss Mathis, while a failure as a supervisor, was successful as a writer and will always be remembered by the industry for several of her literary masterpieces, particularly The Four Horsemen, Ben Hur and Irene.

Monty Brice, the brother of the famous Fanny and better known locally as one of the principal writers of the Beery-Hatton comedy series, has jumped up to fifth place on the writers' list. Monty gave up writing for a while and directed Wally Beery in Casey at the Bat. But because Beery has to stand up alone in Casey after Ray Hatton was foolishly withdrawn from the cast by Schulberg, it suffered considerably at the box-office. Therefore, Schulberg evidently figured that Brice was a better writer than director and put him back in the scenario department. But whichever way you figure it out, Brice knows his box-office either as a director or as a writer, and much credit for the success of the Beery-Hatton team is due directly to him.

Lloyd Corrigan, who has been particularly identified with Ray Griffith's and Bebe Daniels' scripts at the Paramount studio, is both the author and scenarist on Bebe's latest release, Swim Girl Swim. Because of very few advanced bookings we have received very few box-office figures as yet on Swim Girl Swim, but if the rest of the figures are as strong as the ones already received it looks as if Bebe may top The Campus Flirt, her best to date.

STARS

Because there are only seventy-two stars in the industry, we are making an exception with this list and publishing it in its entirety. It is interesting to note that Paramount and Fox have contributed one star each to this list since it was last published. Paramount has just taken George Bancroft's name from the list of featured players by announcing that he will be starred immediately in Joseph Conrad's novel Victory. Stardom is certainly due for Bancroft after the many fine performances he has given in such pictures as The Pony Express, White Gold, The Rough Riders and Old Ironsides. His wonderful portrayal of the square shooting crook, who always stood by his pals, in Underworld has increased his popularity and fan-mail to such an extent that Paramount is probably doing the right thing in starring him, as he can truly be called "a star by public demand".

Likewise Fox has also placed Janet Gaynor's name on the starring list, because of the sensation she created in

her portrayal of Diane in Seventh Heaven. Personally I believe that Winnie Sheehan is forcing his little protege to stardom too rapidly. Although a true sensation in Seventh Heaven, this picture has only been exhibited in a few key cities, and, furthermore, Janet has had far too few releases of sufficient importance to establish her with the public. Janet's first starring picture, Two Girls Wanted, is now being released, and it will be of much interest to see just how it fares at the box-office.

Among the others who are making the most rapid strides in their recent releases are Norma Talmadge, Clara Bow, Jack Gilbert, Colleen Moore, Richard Dix, Emil Jannings, Buster Keaton and Billie Dove. Probably the most sensational rise of all of these is that of Emil Jannings. Jannings' last European release, Variety, averaged 77 per cent. capacity, while his first American-made release, The Way of All Flesh, is playing to 86 per cent. capacity, and is still building, although it was a box-office flop locally at the Criterion Theatre.

The great popularity of Ronald Colman and Vilma Banky is again proven by the success of The Magic Flame at the box-office. They are now working on their last picture together, Leatherface, under Fred Niblo's direction. Thereafter Sam Goldwyn plans to star them separately and is now scouting for stories. There is no doubt that they will be very successful as individual United Artists' stars, but it will be very interesting to see just how strong their individual draw really is. Colman of course is much stronger, and especially after the general release of Beau Geste. Since Miss Banky was imported from Hungary three years ago by Sam Goldwyn, she has only appeared in six pictures, two opposite the late Rudolph Valentino and the other four with Colman, yet the six releases have all been such big box-office hits that Miss Banky is certainly due for stardom.

On the entire starring list of seventy-two names there are only seven who are not actually employed in screening stories at present. These are Mae Murray, Douglas McLean, Ray Griffith, Jetta Goudal, Eddie Cantor, Jackie Coogan and Viola Dana. Eddie Cantor having proven a flop in pictures, has returned to the New York stage. Jackie Coogan, having completed his M.-G.-M. contract, is returning to school, and Viola Dana has retired on account of illness. Of the other four stars mentioned above, three are now considering new contracts, but none has signed as yet.

Mae Murray has always been, and still is, a good box-office bet, as was recently proven by Valencia, which although a very poor production held up on the strength of her name. But since she has a much better offer to return to the New York stage as the star of her own review at a tremendous salary and a cut in the profits, she will probably accept the latter.

Doug McLean and Ray Griffith are both considering several local offers as

well as propositions from British National Pictures, who by the way have just released Dorothy Gish and signed Syd Chaplin.

As for Jetta Goudal, I doubt if any producer will be in a very big hurry to sign her up. When Cecil B. de Mille pulled out of the Paramount organization some two and a half years ago, taking Miss Goudal with him, the executives of that company expressed their opinion of her temperament by saying: "Well, thank God she's gone!"

Ever since then the executives, supervisors, directors and writers of the De Mille studio have been battling the Goudal temperament in an effort to please her and yet also satisfy the demands of the box-office, but now they



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have given her up for the last time, and consequently have given the starring role in her new production to Jacqueline Logan on the strength of her characterization of Mary Magdalene in *The King of Kings*.

FEATURED PLAYERS

In glancing over our featured players it is readily seen that many of our near-stars have been gaining, while others have been falling away as box-office draws so rapidly that the demand for their services is getting less and less.

Among the most rapid climbers in popularity since our last featured players' list was published are members of the Paramount Stock Company: Clive Brook, Evelyn Brent, James Hall and Louise Brooks. The great success of *Underworld*, besides promoting Bancroft to stardom, has greatly enhanced the box-office value of Clive Brook and Evelyn Brent and has permanently established their names with the film fans.

Both James Hall and Louise Brooks have been appearing in numerous Paramount releases for the past two years in which they have gained considerable popularity. It was not until the release of their recent box-office success, *Rolled Stockings*, that their real value was proven. Accordingly, Schulberg has just renewed Miss Brooks' contract, while James Hall's contract still has some time to run.

For some reason or other Schulberg seems to be farming Hall out to other studios a great deal. He is now working in a Fox picture, after which, I understand, he is to report to First National for a lead with Colleen Moore. This should be a good move for Hall's popularity because the more good programs a star or featured player appears in, the more first-run houses he will get a "break" in. In other words Hall's pictures, besides running in the Publix houses, will now also appear in the Fox and First National houses. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the "farming-out" policy has become such a popular practice in the Hollywood studios.

It is of special interest to note that on the featured players' list are twelve names of people who were once big stars and who are now gradually slipping away as box-office draws. These players, in accordance with their present standing are: Alice Terry, Pauline Stark, Betty Bronson, Betty Compson, Bert Lytell, Priscilla Dean, Conway Tearle, Alice Joyce, Jack Holt, Alma Rubens, Claire Windsor and Blanche Sweet.

With the exception of Betty Bronson all of these former stars have had their run of popularity over the last eight or nine years and are gradually fading out of the picture. Miss Bronson's case is quite different and rather sad. Rushed into publicity when Jesse Lasky selected her as the Peter Pan girl, indications were that she had a great future. But stars can't just be pushed on the public, regardless of how much publicity they receive, as William Randolph Hearst has also

found out. Miss Bronson's last release, *Ritz*, in which picture she was starred by Paramount, proved that she was not there as a box-office star. Accordingly, Schulberg has just cast her

for leads in Westerns and is now farming her out to Warner's, which probably won't do her any good after the way they have been handling Dolores Costello lately.

AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — The Spectator's 17-Year-Old Critic

ONE of the most striking books I have read in a long time is *Cannibal Nights* by Captain H. E. Raabe. The author's experiences as a trader in the South Seas make up the story, so there is no particular plot. About the best thing is the vivid description of a cannibal feast that the author attended, not as an edible, however. He had the good sense not to hurry through that part of the story. Maybe I'm a savage at heart, but the feast didn't seem very revolting; and it was certainly very interesting.

It is apparent in several places that the author is an amateur at story-telling, but on the whole the story is very well and vigorously written. At the beginning of the story, Captain Raabe gave the impression that he was going to tell more than he did. If he had told in detail about his years with Bully Hayes, a South Sea pirate, the story would have been a great deal more interesting. Maybe he saved that part of his life to put in another book. Such a book would be every bit as interesting as *Cannibal Nights*, which itself is a very good book.

THE only original thing in *Firemen Save My Child!* was the school-room sequence at the very beginning. The rest of the picture was the same old trash that Beery and Hatton have done in all their pictures together. This idea of moving picture comedy teams is faulty anyway. For one thing, the necessity of keeping the two parts equal ruins the picture. If the story gives all the laughs to one character, it has to be butchered to make the honors equal. Then there are few types of stories to suit a team, and there is danger of too much repetition. Apparently Eddy Sutherland, who directed *Firemen Save My Child!* doesn't care how much he repeats, because most of his situations in his latest are the same as they were in *Behind the Front* and *We're In the Navy Now*.

"Silly drivel" characterizes *Firemen Save My Child!* more than anything else. A good deal of the antics of

Beery and Hatton were received in absolute silence by the audience. That wasn't the fault of the two actors, as they are two of the best in the business. It is too bad that their box-office value has to be ruined by stupid production. George Marion's titles were right at home in this picture, although they were a great deal funnier than the rest of the film. Marion is becoming well known for his titles as there was a hum of anticipation when his name was flashed on the screen.

WHOEVER conceived *Hula* certainly had a weird idea of human nature. The characters in *Hula* didn't act like real people. Most of them acted like maniacs and the rest like nothing at all. The story was silly and impossible, like the characters. The plot, that of two women fighting over a married man, was particularly edifying. The rest of the picture was quite in keeping with the main theme, about as vulgar as it could be.

The picture was nothing but Clara Bow jumping about and posing promiscuously around. She is much too fine an actress to be put in such trash. This "mad-cap daughter" stuff on the screen gives me a pain in the neck, anyway. Any girl who can get a slightly insane look on her face and sit on a horse and look devilish at the same time can do it, and it is far below Clara Bow's talents. The rest of the cast was good, but it was all thrown away on such a silly story. George Marion's silly titles came "oft in the silly night".

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VOICES FROM THE WILDERNESS

By DARRYL ZANUCK

The following paragraphs are from a letter by Darryl Zanuck which is treated editorially in another place in this issue:

Mr. Curtiz, as you state, is a very excellent director; and I heartily agree and am in accord with the applause you have given him for this particular piece of work. But to say that none but Mr. Curtiz alone had anything to do with the production is wrong. Under my screen name of Melville Crossman, I wrote the story; and used this nom de plume only to disguise credit, and give director and adaptor and those who actually did the greatest share of work, the full honor for the picture.

However, eliminating the fact that I am the author of the story and that I worked tooth and nail with Mr. Curtiz and the adaptor, throughout the production, I want to speak in behalf of the Warner Brothers system of supervision, which is not supervision, but which is purely and simply co-operation. In the making of *The Devil's Paradise*, we did not allow time or money or effort to stop us. You will note the production is set in an accurate background, for which credit must be given to the technical department, the photographers, the art directors, and the costumers. In its final editing, the production was handled by our studio editors, who cut and titled the production in a quite efficient manner. Every sequence and every episode in the production was discussed in my office; and some of the trick effects of photography were done by our technical department, co-operating with Mr. Curtiz.

Making a picture is by no means a one man proposition. Sympathetic understanding and sincere co-operation resulted in *The Devil's Paradise*. Mr. Curtiz injected his individuality and personality into the handling of the production, and for this he has achieved an excellent masterpiece, and he alone deserves the credit—but in order for him to succeed, he must have that same co-operation, encouragement, and material, both story and fact, that all Warner productions receive from the "stubborn and ignorant supervisors", as you brand them.

(I can not recall having branded supervisors as "stubborn and ignorant". However, it's all right. Most of them are. W. B.)

ANOTHER SOLUTION

My dear Mr. Beaton:

Since everyone is now expounding their theories on cutting down production cost, I thought that I would take a "hack" at it and give you the ideas of one who has been for nine years one of the "poor working stiff's" in the picture business.

First, I would prohibit any releasing company from making their own pictures. The making of a picture and

the releasing of it are two separate businesses requiring a different type of man to accomplish each one. The present big fellows would let out contracts to individuals specializing on production alone to make their pictures for them. They would turn their present plants into leasing studios and allow their producers to shop where they will for their space and interiors.

I know these sound like broad statements, but let me show you a few of the good results obtaining from this system.

Each picture would be treated as a present day "quickie" is handled now. It would be made "on the desk" before starting. By this I mean that everything would be planned out beforehand and the script adhered to. There would be no devastating "overhead" in the form of useless figureheads posing as executives. The rental studios being on a competitive basis would bring set construction down to a new low point. There would be less miscasting of pictures because only one or two featured players would be tied up by each unit. The "stock player" would not be used in place of the actor fitted for the part just to keep him working. It has been my personal observation that a great deal of time and money has been wasted by actors and directors drinking while on the job (especially "on location"). These selfish weaklings who put physical gratification ahead of giving their best efforts to earn the very generous salaries paid them would eliminate themselves by sheer necessity. In other words their indiscretions would not be absorbed by pictures made by hard working men who realize that this is a business and that they have no more right to spend their employer's time in carousing than they would have in any legitimate business, as is now the case in mass production. In short, everything could and would be treated in a more closely watched and business-like manner.

Under this system, too, the story would become more and more the predominant thing and the "stars" and

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The Hollywood Book Store
(Opposite Hotel Hollywood)

"names" less important, for the releasing companies, having no production worries, would become more critical of the story to be produced and demand better stuff before putting their "Okeh" on it. This naturally would tend to cut down the importance of these publicity made "names" and allow more money to be spent on good stories. The finest minds in the world would be attracted to the writing of screen stories and the excellence of their specialized work would so overshadow that of the higher paid imported author-celebrity (who has invariably in the past been such a "bust") that this evil would be overcome.

Just an instance to show what a clear minded actor imported from Europe really thinks of our picture business. He said, "What a marvelous joke this game is! Imagine my being worth \$2000.00 per week to anyone! I hope they never get 'wise' to me!" And isn't it a joke to pay a man that much when you stop to consider that acting is his business and he merely played well a wonderful part which a studio gave him, and they did the rest with their exploitation of that fact and picture? I could name dozens of these instances, as you no doubt could also. It is to me the greatest evil of the present system and can only be overcome by playing up the importance of the story and spending the advertising money on the story rather than on the players.

I've a lot more thoughts on these subjects, but do not wish to bore you any more than I already have. I had to get them off my chest to someone and I hope you won't feel like the young lady who was the object of the unwanted affections of a certain young man who said, "Out of a hundred million people, why did you pick on me?"

BART A. CARRE.

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VARIETY

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THE BOX-OFFICE'S ROLL of HONOR

(Percentages represent batting averages of the different personalities on all releases for the past eighteen months, as reported in The Spectator on August 20.)

STARS

	Per cent.
CHAS. CHAPLIN	100
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS	100
HAROLD LLOYD	100
Rudolph Valentino	96
John Barrymore	93
Lon Chaney	92
John Gilbert	86
Ronald Colman	85
Wallace Beery	82
Richard Dix	81

STARS

	Per cent.
NORMA TALMADGE	87
Greta Garbo	86
Lillian Gish	86
Clara Bow	85
Colleen Moore	84
Mary Pickford	81
Marion Davies	80
Vilma Banky	80
Bebe Daniels	79
Norma Shearer	79

WRITERS

	Per cent.
FRED DE GRESAC	100
Bess Meredyth	92
Laurence Stallings	91
Frances Marion	88
John McDermott	87
Lenore Coffe	86
Dorothy Farnum	86
Elliott Clawson	85
Hans Kraly	84
Ben Glazer	84

DIRECTORS

	Per cent.
KING VIDOR	96
Fred Niblo	95
Clarence Brown	92
Cecil B. de Mille	91
Geo. Fitzmaurice	90
Eddie Sutherland	88
Henry King	86
Von Stroheim	85
Tod Browning	84
Clarence Badger	84

SUPERVISORS

	Per cent.
IRVING THALBERG	85
John Considine Jr.	84
Sam Goldwyn	82
Winnie Sheehan	80
Ben Schulberg	78
Lloyd Sheldon	87
Ralph Block	78
Jack Warner	78
Julian Johnston	78
Eric Pommer	77

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- that it will be the means of bringing thousands of visitors and guests to our city.
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- that it will have 418 rooms en suite each with bath, also excellent food prepared by Julien Prebost, a chef with a national reputation.
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- that it will be the home of many associated with the motion picture industry.
- that it will have furniture and appointments never before used in any hotel.
- that you may now come in and make reservations for its opening in October.
- that this hotel is one of Hollywood's greatest assets.

Do you know that you are doing all you can to boost it.



Mary Pickford scores in latest

— o —

Eastern bankers pick best run lot

— o —

Producers do not give employees
a square deal

— o —

How Fox treats his newest star,
Janet Gaynor

— o —

THE FOURFLUSHER

WOMAN ON TRIAL

STOLEN BRIDE

THE FLYING NUT

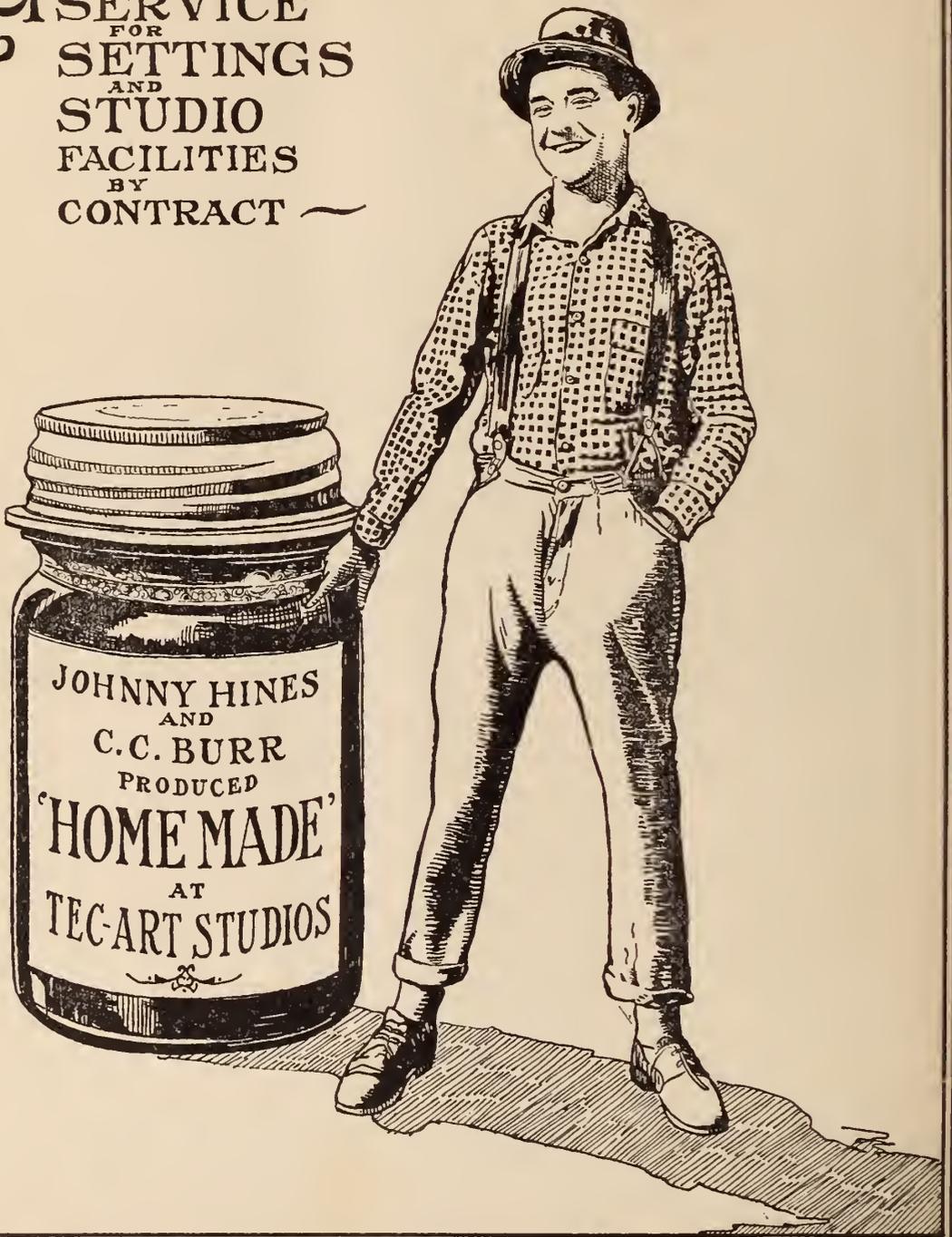
A TOM MIX PICTURE

DOG OF THE REGIMENT

GIRL FROM CHICAGO

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 FOR
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 AND
 STUDIO
 FACILITIES
 BY
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TEC-ART
 STUDIOS
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PHONE
 GRANITE 4141.

picture I am viewing, although everyone tells me I should, but when this bedroom sequence got off to what I considered a false start I noted how the large audience received it. The subsequent action was designed to get laughs, and it got some, but I noted that although there was a lot of comedy in the situation the laughs were scattered, not being anywhere as nearly general as those which greeted more plausible sequences. I satisfied myself that the audience knew that Tryon could not have entered the room without Pat hearing him, and that as a consequence it refused to be interested in what followed. The obsession for absolute rot was carried to a harmful extent in a banquet scene. By an amusing accident Tryon finds himself called upon to make a speech. The situation presented a rare opportunity for a really witty speech, but instead of titles with some humor in them, we are given a lot of rot that only some insane person would utter. But the intelligent-looking diners applaud it. It would have been consistent to have shown the diners amazed at the insane utterances, but by no possibility could one conceive of them taking the speech seriously and applauding it. It is one of the several sequences in the picture that lacks sincerity. As a vehicle for demonstrating that Tryon has comedy possibilities *The Flying Nut* is a success. Also, we can thank it for presenting Patsy Ruth Miller in an agreeable part. She stands well upon my list of favorites. McIntosh scores again in a comedy role and Brand Whitlock gives another of his sincere characterizations as a heavy. But I hope that Universal will not overlook any more such opportunities as this picture gave it. A good farce can not be made out of a good comedy script, not even with the intelligent direction that William Craft gives *The Flying Nut*.

Might Make Westerns Somewhat Intelligent

ALTHOUGH I do my best to make myself clear when I put a thought in writing I don't seem to succeed at all times. In a recent *Spectator* I stated that the pictures that had the most universal appeal were Westerns, and that they could be made popular in first run houses all over the world. A few days ago I had lunch in a studio cafe with a number of really intelligent picture people. All of them had read my remarks about the Westerns, and with great unanimity they jumped on me. They said that big houses had tried out Westerns and could not interest their patrons in them. They cited instances of New York turning down good Westerns. The kind of Westerns that I was referring to are good ones, not the terrible kind that we are getting now. The vast majority of people love the out-doors, fine riding, shooting from the hip, and he-men and she-women. I don't believe I ever heard anyone say that he did not like Westerns. I have heard any number say that they did not like the kind we are getting. I am confident that some producer could make a clean-up with a series of Westerns patterned after those we see now, but with sensible stories that would not offend one's intelligence. I viewed a Tom Mix picture the other night. It was about some Red River gang. It was produced on a lavish scale in respect to scenery, and had a pretty good cast, but it was one of the most asinine things I ever saw. Undoubtedly it was made on the theory that anything will go in a Western. To start with, it was the usual stock model, with its gang of outlaws and the hero who outwits them. That would not be so

JAMES A. CREELMAN

WRITER

Is now under contract
to this office



Demmy Lamson, Mgr.
Ruth Collier, Associate

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Do you know that you are doing all you can to boost it.

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Edited by
WELFORD BEATON

THE 20 Cents FILM SPECTATOR

Published In Hollywood Every Other Saturday

Vol. 4

Hollywood, California, October 29, 1927

No. 5

Raoul Walsh's eating and legs epic

We make reply to eastern bankers

Time is ripe for actors to organize

Foreigners taking all the good jobs

Hays heads a vicious organization

Winnie Sheehan's great Irish heart

SYMPHONY

IN OLD KENTUCKY

THE WHITE LIE

GOOD TIME CHARLEY

LEGS OF CARMEN

THANKS FOR BUGGY RIDE

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Mr. Welford Beaton,
Film Spectator,
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Hollywood, California

Dear Welford:

In the story which you wrote in your last edition in reference to your trip to the Paradise Trout Club you mentioned that you did not know whether one could join the Trout Club or not, so I would like to run a little ad in your next edition so as to let my friends and good sportsmen know that there are a few memberships available at \$103.60, which includes the first year's dues and Government tax.

The Paradise Trout Club is not a promotion deal. The property is owned in fee by myself and my partner, Phil de Merce, and all improvements have been made by us, and we have not depended upon membership money for developing the property. So when one becomes a member of this Club, he is not gambling as he must do in promotion propositions.

Welford, I want to thank you a lot for your very wonderful write-up and for your very beautiful description of our Club in your October 15th edition of the Film Spectator.

Please get in touch with my office in reference to placing an ad in your next edition, 1110 Guaranty Building, Hollywood, Gladstone 2115.

Yours very truly,

Noah N. Beery

NB:h

Dear Noah - Sorry I missed you. I think your letter makes a damned good ad. It needs so much space. W.B.

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of wolves

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old friend

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DANIEL G. TOMLINSON

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GLADSTONE 4809

TITLES *by*

DWINELLE BENTHALL
and RUFUS McCOSH

228 MARKHAM BLDG.
HOLLYWOOD

JOHN FARROW

WRITER

DE MILLE STUDIO



To those engaged in the creative branches of screen art

I HAVE been doing, and I will continue to do, what little I can to bring about reforms in the motion picture industry that will improve your condition, make you happier in your work, and increase your earning power. I am advocating these reforms because I believe in them, not to make things better for you. But it so happens that my policy and your interests are identical, and as I have no material interest in the outcome of the campaign, you will be the sole beneficiaries of anything that we may accomplish together.

Those whose policies I have been called upon to oppose are making it as difficult as possible for The Spectator to continue to exist. They have promised that they will put it out of business, and as far as I know it is the only one of their promises that they are making a diligent effort to keep.

If on The Spectator's paid subscription list there were the names of five thousand exhibitors, the paper would be able to laugh at any efforts to destroy it. Its voice would be heeded, and it would be a valuable friend to you.

I do not command the money to meet the expense of a campaign to secure five thousand exhibitor subscribers. I see no way of obtaining it.

Will five hundred of you, whose interests are at stake, subscribe to ten copies each that I may send to exhibitors with your compliments? It will cost each of you fifty dollars, which will be an investment in your own welfare.

This proposal to the personnel of the industry is made at the suggestion, and upon the advice, of twenty leading screen people, three of whom brought the idea to me, and the rest of whom gave it their earnest support. The first plan was to make a quiet canvass without publicity, but I preferred this method.

Welford Beaton

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Mail it.**

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Will Hays writes us and we
write him

Evidence against the producers is
piling up

We give producers a little free
advice

Raymond Griffith victim of black-
listing plot

What screen workers can do to
help themselves

THE GAUCHO
ON HIS TOES
A TEXAS STEER

THE SPOTLIGHT
ALMOST HUMAN
THE LAST MOMENT

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HELEN OF TROY

(Advertisement)

To Actors and Writers

Only by organization can you accomplish anything.

EDWARD LEVEQUE Your self-appointed committee, which is supplementing constructively the valiant campaign which The Spectator is waging in your behalf, urges you now to weld your power by strengthening the organizations that can be made of service to you.

ACTORS are urged to join Equity.

WRITERS are urged to join the Guild.

The Guild is meeting the writers more than half way by suspending the one hundred dollar initiation fee and admitting them as members without any preliminary payment. No writer now has any excuse for not aligning himself with The Guild.

Your Committee of Twenty has a long and constructive program mapped out. It is predicated upon the existence of powerful organizations of screen workers. Without such organizations we can not make ourselves effective.

Producers are organized.

We must be.

THE COMMITTEE OF TWENTY

idea that the producers were such unutterable asses. But let me tell it to you from the beginning. The Spectator of four weeks ago produced results in the form of calls from representatives of the various branches of picture workers. I told them that I had started on what I imagined would be a year's campaign to improve the status of the personnel, a time which could be shortened if the personnel did something for itself. We decided to move along together. Besides my own attorneys, we have at our disposal the services of no less than nine legal firms which represent prominent stars and directors. This array of legal talent was too bulky to be comfortable until the tasks were systematized. One firm was appointed for each studio, my own attorneys acting as a clearing house. The first task was to secure affidavits which would support the counts in a brief to be filed against the Hays organization as a body and its members as individuals, under the headings, (a) Restraint of trade. (b) Violation of contract. (c) Blacklisting. (d) Specific cases of grossly unjust treatment of employees. The extraordinary ease with which the affidavits are being secured, and the damaging particulars which they set forth, are what prompted my remark that the producers are unutterable asses. They have been so brazen and so indiscreet in their treatment of employees that we have had no trouble in securing a staggering mass of evidence which now is being put into proper shape by the attorneys. One thing out of which our attorneys get a big kick is the proof of indiscretions committed by attorneys for the producers. We have, for instance, the spectacle of a Lasky attorney threatening an actor with the closure of all studios against him, making this blackmailing threat in one instance in the presence of two witnesses, and in another with the intercommunicating telephone system open, enabling three people in another room to hear the voices. We were offered innumerable affidavits by people whom Louis B. Mayer threatened to crush unless they met his terms, and have selected only enough of them to serve our purpose. Mayer is such a wild talker that his indiscretions alone are enough to crush the Hays organization, but we will have at least three affidavits involving each member of the conspirators' ring. The progress we have made to date reveals the Hays organization as such a hopelessly brainless body that attacking it is not even invigorating mental exercise.

* * *

To Draw Teeth of Hays Organization

ALL the steps in the campaign to wrest motion pictures from the clutches of the pirates who now control them have been thought out carefully. It was decided, for instance, six weeks ago that I would reveal in this issue of The Spectator what we had done to date. It was decided also that the names of those prominent men and women of the screen who compose the board of strategy should not be made public until the final showdown comes. We wish to pull the teeth of the Hays organization before we give it anything to chew on. The revelations to date have been such as to lead to talk of a general strike, but I don't think it ever will come to that. Only yellow cowards would resort to the practices indulged in by the members of the Hays organization, and yellow cowards will not carry a fight to a decision. The fight is a

constructive one, although in the beginning it must be destructive. The first step is to smash Will Hays and his gang. The personnel of the industry can not be sure of its position in pictures until this is done. And it will be ridiculously easy, thanks to the incapacity of Hays himself and the numbing effect the overwhelming conceit of the producers has had on their poor mentalities. They have been drunk with power which they exercise drunkenly, leaving them open to attack from every direction. Their method is to refuse to take up the option on the services of a player, director, or writer. This is within their right, and its result would be to make a player a free agent, open to offers from any studio. But no studio makes an offer. Paramount will not exercise its option on Pola Negri, but no producer will make a bid for her services as she is regarded as the property of Paramount. She will be given the alternative of accepting the terms of Paramount or retiring from pictures. If the Paramount attorneys run true to form they will explain this alternative to Miss Negri in plain terms. As our affidavits show, she will be reminded that Paramount can and will crush her. This is a flagrant breach of the laws of the United States. The restraint-of-trade law is one with teeth in it, and steps are being taken to assure the closing of the teeth on the producers. The next step will be to reveal some of the most obnoxious producers in their true colors, which will force the companies employing them to buy up their contracts to get rid of them. Pictures are too respectable to tolerate any longer such tactics as Louis B. Mayer indulges in. Let us consider one of his favorite tricks. He gives to a director a contract calling for the making of three pictures a year at, say, ten thousand dollars per picture. The director thinks he has a contract which assures him an annual income of thirty thousand dollars. But during the entire year he is given but one picture to direct, and when he protests that he is entitled to salary for making three he is referred to his contract which contains no guarantee that he will get his three pictures. If he threatens to appeal to the courts for justice, Mayer goes crazy and screams that he will crush the director by seeing that he never will get a picture to direct in any studio. And Mayer can make good his threat, for his fellow bandits will back him up. This is what the personnel of the industry has had to put up with for a long time. It makes the position of every director unsafe. In its variations the same thing is applied to actors and writers. Is it any wonder that at last the worm has turned? But I would like to point out to all screen workers that they must stand back of those who are waging quietly the battle for their rights. Every actor and actress should join Equity and every writer should become a member of the Guild. I know that the majority of screen people are ignorant and selfish, but in this instance if their brains do not tell them that they should do something for themselves, they should listen to their stomachs. If the present conditions continue to exist stomachs soon will be clamoring.

* * *

Time the Personnel Asserted Its Strength

EVEN if the personnel of the industry did not think in terms of earnings, it is unthinkable that it should endure any longer the vicious and criminal treatment accorded it by the members of the Hays organiza-

living, sought a contract under which he could make pictures in England. One was offered him if he could secure a release in this country, on the face of it an easy thing to do as his reputation is established and any releasing organization would be glad to handle his pictures. But again the Paramount whip was cracked. He could not secure a release. To make a living he must abandon his profession and seek some other work. Zukor, Fox, Mayer, Schenck, and others who form this most vicious band of cut-throats, flaunt the laws of the country and think that they can get away with it. I do not know if restraint of trade is punishable by imprisonment, but if such be the case the next annual meeting of the Hays organization should be held in the penitentiary. But it would be tough on the other inmates.

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Little Difficulty in Enforcing Demands

FOR over six years screen writers have been urging producers to grant them an equitable contract. They are no nearer getting it now than they were six years ago. Yet there has not been a day during the six years that such a contract could not have been secured if the writers were organized properly. Ever since pictures started, actors have been treated as if they were cattle. They are worked night and day. Contracts between them and producers are broken by the latter and the actors are warned that if they sue to assert their rights all studios will be closed to them. At present producers are bringing to Hollywood a steady stream of foreigners to reduce the earnings of our American actors. And our American actors—the poor, dumb brutes—stand for it. The Hays organization is endeavoring to coerce directors into signing contracts dictated by the producers. They are being subjected to indignities heaped upon them by the uncultured vulgarians who control the industry—and it serves them damn well right. If they haven't brains enough to get together and offer resistance, they deserve all they are getting. One thing that writers, actors, and directors should realize now is that they are not going to

HEARTENING

My dear Mr. Beaton:

I believe you honest. I have no memory of a sentence of your writing tainted by the policy of profit. I have a long list of theatrical publications that took root, blossomed, bloomed and withered under the policy of catering to the advertising department. Many of these periodicals more than crossed the borders of actual blackmail. It has been the curse of theatrical periodicals and they have inevitably and deservedly died. Your Spectator seems as yet entirely free from the stigma of policy. Your paper should live and prosper. While we may not always agree with you, you are a counter irritant that makes us think and you are immensely valuable to our industry.

I, therefore, send you my fifty dollars to be applied to the further circulation of your paper, and as I do not do this with ulterior motives of self exploitation, send your paper to the ten exhibitors you deem most important to you, as your own gift.

With cordial regards,
THEODORE ROBERTS.

be treated fairly until they put themselves in a position to demand fair treatment. I do not mean that they will have to form a union and march down Sunset behind a band blaring defiance of their bosses. The solution of their problems is a much simpler procedure. All that it involves on the part of the individual is that he should join his organization: in the case of an actor, Equity; in the case of the writer, the Guild; in the case of the director, a strong organization that must be formed. I am sorry that at this time I can not reveal you more of the plans of the Committee of Twenty, but I want to impress upon you that the plans are predicated upon having screen workers organized, and doing your part in this connection is all that will be asked of you. A large proportion of writers, actors, and directors are brainless asses from whom nothing may be expected, and those with sense enough to do something to benefit themselves will have to drag the drones with them, but that does not relieve them of the necessity of taking action. In the past their psychology has been wrong. They have regarded the producers as supermen, against whom their own efforts would be impotent. They have regarded the Hays organization as too powerful to combat. Yet when you take it apart you find that it is composed of ordinary mortals without brains enough to be on the square. Although the producers would be the chief beneficiaries of any improvement in screen conditions, they lack the sense to realize it. They consider it good business to treat their employees like serfs, and to subject them to every form of indignity and injustice that warped minds can conceive. How many actors and actresses have reason to know that a contract to play a part for Paramount is not worth the paper it is written on if Paramount wishes to repudiate it? "We will make it up some other way," is the standard promise of Paramount when it ignores its own written agreement, and from then on it ignores the promise. And what can the actor do? He could appeal to the courts and secure judgment—and thereafter get no more parts to play in any studio. This is the condition that soon will be corrected. With all branches of studio workers thoroughly organized they can demand justice and get it. The plans of the Committee of Twenty contemplate providing legal services for actors, writers and directors too poor to employ attorneys. That much I will tell you. The weakness of the position of the producers lies in the fact that they are wrong. They have untold millions of dollars at their command, but this strength is offset by the fact that their employees have right on their side. And right need never be afraid of dollars.

* * *

It's Mean to Treat Will in This Way

THE Authors League of America is trying to get Will Hays to tell it why some stories are banned from the screen, while still dirtier ones are made into pictures. It cites *They Knew What They Wanted*, produced by Paramount, and *Rain*, produced by United Artists. The authors are unkind to embarrass poor Will in this way. His whole strength lies in the superstition that exists that he is a man of great power, that he has the authority to approve this story and disapprove that one. In theory he has, but in fact he hasn't. He does what he is told to do. Joe Schenck, Louis B. Mayer, and someone in the Para-

mount organization give him his orders. To ask him why he approved *Rain* is to put his Presbyterianism to a severe test, for if he tells the truth—that Joe Schenck told him to—it would be a serious blow to his reputation as a czar. Already the reputation is threatened by the talkativeness of Mayer, who boasts to authors that he will have Hays approve any story he wishes to screen. Hays is not in a position to approve or disapprove a story on its merits. With him the sole consideration is who wants to screen it. His real bosses, United Artists, Paramount, and Metro, can get anything past him, but with any of the less important members of his organization the case is different. De Mille had the first idea for a West Point picture, and his company was the first on the ground at West Point to make such a picture. Priority is supposed to give the members of the Hays organization the right to their ideas. But Metro decided to make a West Point picture also, Mayer cracked his whip, and Hays gave him sole permission to use West Point in the title of a picture. Had the position been reversed—if Metro had been first in the field with the idea—De Mille would not have been allowed to make his picture at all. Some day the Hays organization will fall apart from its own rottenness. Assuming for the moment that Hays has some authority, how can he ban any story in the future after having approved *Rain*? I am not arguing on moral grounds, for I think that *Rain* is a powerful drama. I would like to see it put on the screen exactly as it is written if there were some way of keeping children from seeing it, but until we can make pictures for selected audiences we must deny ourselves such dramatic treats. As long as he poses as the czar of motion pictures Hays must take full responsibility for passing *Rain*. It was unfortunate for him that the story was given Raoul Walsh to direct, for all the dramatic strength of the original will be stifled in the stench that Walsh will put on the screen. He shot scenes that were so disgusting that they nauseated those working on the set. He inveigled Gloria Swanson into being an innocent contributor to one scene that is too disgusting for me to describe in print. When he works on the Fox lot he makes such scenes solely to be rewarded by Winnie Sheehan's guffaws in a projection room, and no doubt he and Winnie have split their sides over this scene which he shot on the United Artists lot. It will make a valuable contribution to the filthy film already in the Fox vaults, for there is no place for it on a lot as decent as United Artists'. When Walsh's conception of John Colton's fine drama reaches the public under the name of Sadie Thompson, poor old Will is going to have a devil of a time explaining how he came to approve it. The easiest way out would be for him to confess that Joe Schenck made him, but he will not take it, for at any cost his dignity must be preserved. It is interesting to speculate on the probability of the Hays organization disintegrating from the inside before it can be attacked on the outside. Its less important members surely will not continue to expose themselves to the penalties that can be imposed on them on account of the unprincipled actions of a few of its leaders. It is a corporation that may be proceeded against in the courts and the smallest member can not escape responsibility on the plea that he had no voice in determining its policies.

"The Gaucho" Has Everything

THE GAUCHO will be judged more by its departure from what we expect from Douglas Fairbanks than by its merits as a motion picture. That is natural. For years Doug has educated us to expect from him a certain kind of picture. That we liked the kind, Doug's tremendous popularity throughout the world bears testimony. The joyousness of *Robin Hood*, the whimsy of *The Thief of Bagdad*, the audacity of *Black Pirate*, bore the true Fairbanks flavor as we conceive it. It was as reasonable to expect a tragedy from Doug as to look to him for a picture with a religious theme. Getting the latter, our first reaction is that Doug has taken liberties with us, that he lured us into a theatre to see a certain kind of picture and gave us another kind, and in estimating the merits of what we get we can not avoid basing our estimate on what we thought we were going to get. That is unjust to both Doug and the picture. The *Gaucho* is his offering as a picture, and our inclination is to view it as the offering of himself. I saw it before the opening at the Chinese, and told Doug that I was disappointed with it. I saw it at the opening and then told Doug that I was delighted with it, and for good measure I told Mrs. Mary Fairbanks, his wife, that I thought it was a splendid picture. By the time I saw it a second time I had recovered from my surprise at the theme, and viewed it critically as a motion picture. I found a production sweeping and impressive both in conception and execution, a well knit story, drama, comedy, and fine acting. I can think of nothing else that a picture must have to make it a satisfactory example of screen art. The *Gaucho*, in my opinion, is the finest thing that Douglas Fairbanks has given us. He has dared to be serious, and has done it well. I believe that he did not succeed in putting on the screen everything that he wanted to, that he found it difficult to express himself freely because he was handling thoughts unlike any that he had ever before tried to translate in terms of the screen. There seems to be some indecision in the cutting, and a too labored attempt to keep the various interests of the story advancing abreast, but they are minor faults that did not keep me from thoroughly enjoying the picture. That, after all, is the only thing that matters about *The Gaucho* as far as I am concerned. I enjoyed it, and Doug's sole idea in making it was to provide me and you with enjoyment. Douglas Fairbanks is one of the principal assets of pictures. As a man he contributes to their respectability, and as an artist he contributes to their dignity. No one else connected with the screen is supplied so abundantly with talents so varied. He writes his own stories, conceives his own settings, practically does his own directing, acts his part capably, and can leap over a windowsill as gracefully as Pavlova can execute the gavotte. He dares greatly in spending money on a production, but is such a good showman that he never has had a failure. Screen people have reason to be as proud of Doug as they are. If we could trade the entire membership of the Hays organization for one more man like him we'd be a great deal better off. But there I go again! This paragraph is supposed to be about *The Gaucho*, not about the goitre from which the screen is suffering. But as long as we have even one Douglas Fairbanks we are not so badly off. And an art

that can produce a Gaucho is a long way from being decadent.

* * *

Doug as an Actor and an Athlete

DOUG'S own performance in *The Gaucho* is easily the best he ever has given on the screen. Throughout his career his grin and agility were commodities that he could sell so readily that there was no necessity to trot out anything else that would give us the measure of his ability as an actor. But in his latest picture he reveals himself as a real artist. Two finely done bits are his reaction to the tragedy of the leper's touch, and the expression of his joy when he realizes that the magic pool has cured him. In his lighter moments he is as effective as ever, and the way he keeps on, year after year, doing his athletic stunts is extraordinary. Quite as extraordinary is the grace of all his movements. I can't recall any previous picture in which it was so apparent. After the scene in which he reaches the roof of a building by swinging from story to story on awnings, I heard a woman near me whisper something about a double. It might interest anyone with a similar idea to know that one morning Doug and I were strolling around the United Artists lot and came to the awnings set. I asked him what he was going to do there. He did not tell me; he showed me. If he would swing his way up those awnings to amuse me it is not likely that he would employ a double to do it in the picture. Doug's keen sense of pictorial humor provides *The Gaucho* with some rich comedy. When he and the girl quarreled and Doug made no bones about striking her, he injected comedy and at the same time made a big contribution to his characterization. It pointed up the com-

EXHIBITORS!

For the second time since they pledged their word of honor that there would be no cut in salaries, motion picture producers are engaged in making a drastic cut. The present cut is confined to actors and actresses. When it has been established, there will be a reduction in the salaries of directors and writers. The first cut means that players whose presence in casts have made pictures profitable to you are to be supplanted with unknowns who will bring nothing to your box-offices. There will be a lowering in the standard of the pictures that you will buy for the next year. Good pictures can be made only by the employment of good actors, and the good actors are being eliminated. Producers are engaged in cheating you as they are cheating their employees. They are making their pictures more cheaply. See that you pay less for them! When I put the question squarely to Louis B. Mayer he refused to deny that he has a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer that will net him eight hundred thousand dollars a year. When you buy an M.-G.-M. picture remember that you are contributing to this preposterous salary. At the same time remember that Mayer is squeezing every cent he can out of those whose popularity brings business to your houses. Spring these facts on the Metro salesman who ask you to buy their pictures. Economy in motion picture production is a good thing. But see that you get your share of the saving by paying less for your pictures!

pletteness of his transition from a good natured ruffian to a man with reverence for the saintly girl of the shrine. Estimating him as a producer, Douglas Fairbanks has no peer in the business. He has given *The Gaucho* a magnificent production, one that of itself makes the picture a notable one. The amazing thing about it is that all the scenes except those showing trees were made on the United Artist lot. All the imposing mountain scenes, the passes between gigantic cliffs, the *Miracle City* as a whole, so well constructed and photographed that the world will think them genuine location shots, were made within an area of about a quarter of a city block, and in the heart of Hollywood. Theodore Reed, the manager of production and probably the most skilled engineer in pictures, deserves unbounded praise for his great contribution to *The Gaucho*. Next to Douglas, the most interesting person on the screen is Lupe Velez, the vibrant youngster who makes her debut in this picture. Within one year this young bundle of energy and brains will rank among our most prominent stars. As a first effort her performance is extraordinary. During its course she portrays practically all the emotions, and the rapidity and completeness of her transitions are remarkable. Both the shrine girls, Ceraine Greear and Eve Southern, reveal a full appreciation of the spiritual quality of their parts. An unusual feat is accomplished by Albert MacQuarrie, the victim of the black doom. Although his costume is gruesome and his face is hidden, he manages to give a definite characterization to the outcast. Charles Stevens gives a very good account of himself, and Gustav von Seyffertitz, Michael Vavitch, and Nigel de Brulier contribute the performances we could expect from such finished artists. For some reason we never attach much importance to the director of a Fairbanks picture, for we can not be sure just what his contribution to it is. F. Richard Jones directed *The Gaucho*, and the fact that the whole picture is good means that whatever he contributed to it has merit. We can set the picture down as one of the finest things that Douglas Fairbanks has done. Whether his admirers will accept such a radical departure from his usual offering will be told by the box-office.

* * *

Sid Grauman Puts on a Great Show

SID GRAUMAN has an uncanny way of keeping one or two jumps ahead of the people who poke money through the openings in his box-office. He must have felt that one more of even the fine prologues that he has given us in the past would be just one too many, and as an eye-opener for *The Gaucho* he gives us a vaudeville show. It is the only prologue—to give it its generic name—that I have seen in the past couple of years without being more or less bored. We Americans are funny. The stolidity with which we accept prologues and stage performances sets us apart as a long suffering race. The European is not so complaisant. When he doesn't like a stage offering he gives tongue to his displeasure. One of my painful memories is the joyous abandon with which I leaned back in my seat in a Paris theatre and shouted, "Rotten! Give him the hook!" until the misery of the poor devil whose dancing did not please the audience, became so apparent that I became ashamed of myself for my contribution to the shouts of hundreds of others and

solaced myself only with the thought that even if anyone heard me, it would lead to nothing as they probably have another word in French for "hook", even if they use them. But I have sat through prologues and stage presentations in Los Angeles picture houses and thought longingly of the house in Paris where one may express himself. At the premier of *The Gaucho*, however, my only yells were those of approval. Sid has given us an excellent entertainment, nicely balanced, colorful, and tuneful. It is not weighed down with an attempt to create and maintain atmosphere in keeping with the theme of the picture that is to follow it. A motion picture is a self-contained piece of entertainment, which carries its atmosphere along with it and is not dependent on the volume of noise and the riot of color that the house manager can buy. Such prologues attracted us at first by their novelty, but we've had an overdose of them. Sid, astute showman that he is, sensed this, and assembled a bunch of entertainers that make us forget all other prologues and want to go again to enjoy his. It strikes a serious note for a moment only to prepare us for the beauty of the opening sequence in *The Gaucho*, a sequence that is done in subdued colors, and which is one of the most artistic things that Technicolor has given us. It takes us gradually from the richly colored stage presentation to the black and white of the main portion of the picture. I suppose producers some day will realize that we will not have perfect pictures until they reproduce the natural colors of the objects photographed. In a quarter of a century of steady progress pictures have not progressed past the point of showing us the difference in color between white, pink, and red roses except in various shades of black and white. That color photography is too expensive, is the claim of those who make our pictures. To quite an extent the excessive cost is a figment of the producer's brain, for I don't think many of them have taken the trouble to find out what the cost is. If the big studios would adopt a sane method of operating they would save so much money that they could give us gorgeous features in color at less expense than it takes them now to turn out their black and white features. In a projection room the other day I saw a dream sequence done in Technicolor for Corinne Griffith's next release. It is exquisite, and demonstrates the perfection Technicolor has achieved in reproducing natural colors on the screen. Imagine a George Fitzmaurice feature done in Technicolor!

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The Private Life of Helen of Troy

THE Private Life of Helen of Troy certainly misses fire. First National had an inviting opportunity to give us a sparkling comedy, but gums it up. It is rich in production value, and that is all that can be said for it. One of the chief weaknesses of the production is the editing. I do not think I ever saw a more striking example of a picture being spoiled by close-ups. I was treated to so many totally meaningless close-ups of Maria Corda that I lost all interest in her. "Which gown shall I wear?" is a spoken title accompanied by a close-up which fills the screen. If Miss Corda had spoken a dramatic title in the picture it would have been necessary to enlarge the screen and use the Magnascope in order to give it the emphasis it required to distinguish it from the flock of

ordinary close-ups that mean nothing. Possibly if the wife of the director had not been the leading woman the picture would not have been ruined as it was. The over-indulgence in close-ups was particularly stupid in this production. The humor of the story lies in the application of modern conditions to ancient times. It is a modern story in an old setting, consequently it derives most of its humor from the setting. And First National was lavish with the setting, which in the editing was blotted out constantly and in its place we have gigantic heads of the characters. Devoid of all drama, it is essentially a picture in which there should be no close-ups. That the audience appreciated the humor of the idea was shown by the laughter that greeted the title, "Join the navy and see the world", spoken by Lewis Stone, the Spartan King, when he declared war. There is nothing in the title itself to cause laughter, the humor being in the use of a well known modern slogan in such a setting. But, as I have said, First National gave us as little of the setting as it could, apparently on the theory that Maria Corda is the whole picture. She should not have been cast in the part of Helen. She has beauty, but nothing else that the role calls for. We have dozens of girls in Hollywood who could have given the characterization the scintillating comedy interpretation it needed to make the picture the gay thing it might have been. The story is one that called for a display of real cleverness in its screen interpretation, but that quality is lacking. There are few laughs in it despite the fact that the screen gives a "comedy constructor" among those present on the set. The idea of needing someone to "construct" comedy for a story that is all comedy is ridiculous—much funnier, in fact, than anything that came of it. The picture would have been one long laugh if it had been directed with a sense of humor, without any effort having been made to force the humor. Alexander Korda—in the case of his wife it is Corda—directed the picture with a total lack of appreciation of its comedy possibilities. The humor is all American, and the direction all Hungarian. First National's folly in not giving the story to one of the many American directors with a sense of humor probably will cost it several hundred thousands dollars, the difference between what the picture is and what it might have been. The scene showing the wooden horse entering Troy loses much of its effectiveness on account of the failure to point it up. A title states that the Spartans have given up and left for home. It should have been explained that they had retired on account of their failure to enter the city, and the audience should have been acquainted with the fact that there were soldiers in the horse. Perhaps First National will argue that everyone knows the story of

LUCK OR BRAINS?

Arrived in Hollywood October 12th. Was cast by Mr. Wesley Ruggles in "Finders Keepers" on Oct. 15th. Finished with Mr. Ruggles on November 14th. Was cast by Mr. Gorden Cooper in "Sin Town" Nov. 15.

MAYBE THE BOY IS GOOD

JACK OAKIE

the wooden horse. In my day in the newspaper world we had a rule that you must never assume that the reader knows anything. It should be applied to pictures. Among the people who will see the picture there will be millions who never heard of this story. To them the horse entering the city will mean nothing. A strenuous attempt is made to save the picture with titles. There are twice as many as there should be, and they are only half as funny as they might have been.

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Mostly About Me and Mrs. Sam Rork

SOME months ago there was a brief paragraph in The Spectator to the effect that producers were overlooking a good bet in Hoyt's *A Texas Steer*. I said that a most entertaining picture could be made out of what had been a successful play. We will fade out on that and fade in on the breakfast room in the Sam Rork residence in Beverly Hills. Present, Mr. and Mrs. Sam. Mrs. Sam reading The Spectator. "You seem to attach importance to everything you read in The Spectator," said Mrs. Sam. "Well, listen to this," and she read the brief paragraph. Then she continued: "You have the story. Get busy. And I'll give you another idea—get Will Rogers to play the part of the congressman." Until she brought Will into the conversation, Mrs. Sam and I were fifty-fifty, with Sam himself nowhere at all. Mrs. Sam's second suggestion put her away in the lead, but I feel that she and I are entitled to the million dollars the picture is going to make. Perhaps my estimate of the profits is too conservative, for if ever there was a sure-fire box-office picture, *A Texas Steer* is it, and I feel that Sam and Will should be grateful to Mrs. Sam and me. I must remember to tell Sam to send in his check for fifty dollars for ten subscriptions to be sent to exhibitors. But perhaps after Mrs. Sam reads this I won't have to. *A Texas Steer* is going to be an outstanding success because it is a good picture and has in it the best loved man in the United States, and all the European countries, including the Scandinavian. If I wished to subject it to a searching criticism from a purely screen standpoint I could pick many holes in it, but I could not get away from the fact that I enjoyed every foot of it when it was ten or twelve hundred feet longer than it will be when released. Will Rogers has such a hold on the affections of the public that anything with which he is connected will find favor. I doubt if Mark Twain was as close to the country's heart as Will has become. His personality is one that catches the imagination of all classes, and his personality registers strongly all the way through the picture. He is no great shakes as a screen actor, but he is Will Rogers, and that is all that is necessary. He fits his part so admirably that he really is playing himself, consequently he gives a perfect performance. His ability as a writer has expression in a decidedly clever set of titles, and his skill with the rope is demonstrated hilariously in a sequence near the end of the picture. Richard Wallace's direction is peculiar. To me the picture looks as if it might have been made ten or twelve years ago. The technic of that period seems to be in evidence. Heavy curtains are drawn over windows through which sunlight enters, but it makes no difference in the lighting of the room. All the lighting is old fashioned. Every interior is illuminated brilliantly, but the

source of the lighting is not revealed by shadows. The grouping also is old fashioned. In nearly all the scenes the characters line up facing the camera. But no one will notice such things in this picture. A picture featuring Will Rogers could get away with murder. There is a long cast of notable players, too long to be enumerated so near the end of a paragraph. Louise Fazenda gives one of the most brilliant performances of her career. All the acting honors go to her. Never before have I seen her display such a scintillating comedy sense. Ann Rork and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., carry the love story, and do it delightfully. In the length in which I saw it *A Texas Steer* contains many fine and interesting views of Washington, but I am afraid some of them will have to come out to bring the picture down to proper footage. It is a production that can go into the big and little houses all over the world. In this country it will be one of the most successful pictures of the year. It comes at a time when First National needs such a success, and I insist that thanks are due Mrs. Sam Rork and me.

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Introducing to You Mr. Paul Fejos, Genius

PAUL FEJOS is a name that probably you never heard before. But you will hear it again. Fejos is an extraordinary picture genius. There are others like him roaming around Hollywood, yearning for an opportunity to express themselves on the screen, but starving while they yearn. They are the ones, at present unknown, who are going to do more for the future of the screen than those who are now famous through their connection with it. No art seems to have advanced far on a full stomach. The pace always is set by hungry men, and more inspiring things have come from garrets than from palaces. Fejos differs from other short-rationed geniuses

JOSEPH JACKSON

Welford Beaton in The Spectator:

"Joseph Jackson wrote the titles of *If I Were Single*. All of them are good, and some of them are decidedly clever. A lot of the laughs which the film provoked were caused by the titles."

JOSEPH JACKSON

has just titled three other comedies for Warner Brothers; and his adaptation of *Powder My Back*, starring Irene Rich, is now in production under the direction of Roy Del Ruth.

LICHTIG AND ENGLANDER
Representatives

in that he got his chance. He has made a six-reel picture, *The Last Moment*, which, in my opinion, is one of the most outstanding works of cinematic art that ever was brought to the screen. It opens with a title setting forth that in the last moment of a man's life there passes through his mind a complete review of his existence on earth. The first shot shows the clutching fingers of a drowning man, which is followed by a dissolve to a small boy just old enough to have a mind which forms memories that he will carry throughout his life. Then for six reels there is presented to us a complete biography of an ordinary man. Otto Mattieson plays the man and throughout the picture gives a splendid performance. But that is not important. Fejos is the hero of the production. He wrote the story and directed it, and with this one effort demonstrates that he stands among the few really great directors. Sequence dissolves into sequence as Mattieson's life unfolds before us, and when it is over we feel that we know him more intimately than it was ever given us to know anyone—and there is not a title in the entire six reels. Fejos's extraordinary ability as a director is demonstrated by the evenness with which he handles all the phases of the man's life, his moments of exaltation and depression; his gaiety, his gravity; his depravity as a drunkard, his triumphs as a great actor; the sordidness of his purely sexual love, the cleanliness of the great love that came to him when the war had made him over—all the phases are handled with assurance and conviction. Just as a man in his lifetime experiences every variety of emotion, so Fejos in his direction runs the same full gamut, and never falters once. There are many extraordinary shots in the picture, the camera work of Leon Shamroy being quite as meritorious in its way as the contributions of Fejos. *The Last Moment* is rich in production values. It has in it ships and railroads, cities and the country, a dive and Monte Carlo, a cheap theatre and a grand one; there are hundreds of people in it, and the atmosphere is maintained faithfully—and the whole production cost four thousand dollars! Between the first shot showing the clutching hand of the drowning man, and the last showing the hand disappearing beneath the water, we have an egrossing, superbly directed, splendidly acted motion picture, and it did not cost one tenth what a big studio wastes on every picture it makes. For seven months Fejos, Shamroy and George McCall, the man who roams around the town so entertainingly in the *Hollywood Citizen*, went on short rations while they tried to raise money to allow Fejos to put his story on the screen. Samuel Freedman, president of the Fine Arts studio, gave them an office on credit, but did not have enough faith in the idea to put actual money behind it. Edward M. Spitz, a young fellow from the East, was seeing the sights of Hollywood when he met Fejos. Spitz had forty-five hundred dollars. Fejos interested him, but told him he probably would lose his money. Spitz was game. He said he'd shoot the roll, all but five hundred, which was held out for the gang to eat on. Perhaps Spitz will lose his money yet. Although the story of the picture is told so plainly that a child could understand it, I feel that exhibitors will steer shy of it on account of its sheer artistry. But it is a picture that the public should see and that everyone in Hollywood should study. If the plan for a motion picture hall of fame goes through, I hereby nominate for a large

niche Paul Fejos. He has won his right to immortality, even if he never makes another picture.

* * *

Dog Pictures That Entertain

THE setting is right for me to discuss dog pictures. One of my dogs is squeezed in beside me in the big chair in which I do my writing, and my pad is resting on the back of another that is curled in my lap. It is late and we are the only members of the household who have not gone to bed. It is the nightly routine. Virgil and Chang have other interests when the world is awake, but at night they deem it their duty to sit up with me until I put the cap on my fountain pen and shake out the cushions upon which they sleep. As long as I write, each of them prefers to be uncomfortable and near me rather than comfortable at a distance. God was in a generous mood when he gave us dogs and planted in us a love of them. But although I've had one or more of them all my life, no dog picture that I have seen has appealed to me. All of them have given us dogs we do not know, doing things that dogs can't do. For me there is more drama in a dog's head in the lap of his master, his eyes looking the greatest faithfulness that we know, than there is in a Strongheart getting his man beneath a snow-capped peak in the Canadian Rockies. I like my dogs to be friends, not policemen. In the early days of *The Spectator*, long before its army of readers grew to its present imposing proportions, I urged producers to give us pictures based on the qualities in a dog that we like, his faithfulness and his great love for man. De Mille seems to be doing it. I

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have not seen *His Dog*, but the other day I went out to Culver City and in a De Mille projection room saw *Almost Human*. I did not know what I was going to see, for the title, like most titles, conveyed nothing to me. I had no idea that it was a dog picture. When the first shot appeared on the screen I was delighted to see that all the actors were dogs, some of them well bred and the others the product of delightful abandon on the part of their parents. Frank Urson directed the picture in a manner that stamps him as a dog lover with a sense of humor. The way he handles the opening conversation between the dogs to plant the story is highly entertaining. One of the dogs asks the others if they would like to hear the story of how he and his mother got a couple of humans out of a mess, and the others being willing, he proceeds to tell it. Throughout the picture the story-telling dog, really the hero, speaks the narrative titles, thus maintaining the atmosphere which envelops the picture from the first. I suppose I am too fond of dogs to be a competent judge of a picture in which they appear, but if you happen to share the fondness with me I am sure that you will find *Almost Human* as truly delightful as I did. If you have children in the family take them to see it, even if you have to sit through one of Jack Haley's presentations before it starts. The hero dog is just dog, his mother a police dog and his father a magnificent pointer, a cross that could produce nothing but intelligence and an overwhelming power to love. Towards the end of the picture the dogs do things that no dogs on earth could do, but by that time you'll be so fond of them that you'll overlook it. I am confident that De Mille is opening a rich vein with the kind of dog pictures that he is making. If he can interest the dog lovers of the world he has no need to worry about the rest. I believe, though, that the perfect dog picture will be one in which the dog is the leading character although he does no acting. The story should revolve around him without taking him out of character. Before dismissing this picture I might mention that Vera Reynolds and Kenneth Thompson are the chief humans in it. It is a long time since I have seen Thompson. He has a screen personality that appeals to me.

* * *

Some Comments on Mystery Pictures

TWO hundred and twenty thousand dollars is a ridiculous price to pay for a play as screen material, but if I were a producer and had to pay that much money, I would rather get Broadway for it than any other play that I have seen. There is a melodrama that could be shot from the play script. Admirable as it is as stage entertainment, I believe it can be made into a still better picture. It has everything that should be in a picture and I hope Universal has enough sense to put into its screen presentation all the quality that makes it successful as a play. The play characterizations should be followed. To cast a standard heavy as Dalton, or to let whoever is cast to play the part as a standard heavy part, would be to rob the picture of what could be one of its strongest features. I have written many times that the screen has the wrong conception of a villain. He should be a cheerful, pleasant fellow, instead of the sneering brute who always is served to us. The heavy in Broadway as I saw it at the Mason is exactly my kind of heavy. No

man is wholly bad, and this villain isn't. His love for the girl is clean and sincere; he apparently is loyal to his friends, and he is generous with his smiles and his laughs. He does not perpetrate one act of villainy that does not come within his code. The detective is another character that should be cast wisely and played as it is on the stage. To show this character as one of the usual cigar-chewing, frowning dicks of screen tradition would be to spoil another big part. In all its essentials Broadway is a mystery play, with the mystery explained from the first. There is drama in every scene in which the detective and the heavy participate because we know that one is a murderer and the other an officer of the law. This makes the play, and will make the picture. When I reviewed Roland West's *The Bat* I said that it would have been an infinitely better picture if we had known from the first who the bat was. It would have given us the same dramatic thrill we get from Broadway. West differed with me. He pointed out that *The Bat* as a play ran for three years on Broadway, and that he put it on the screen as it was played on the stage on account of its great success as a play. If West's reasoning were logical the screen version should have run three years on Broadway also. I don't recollect that it ran three weeks. West's weakness is that he thinks in terms of the stage, and wholly successful pictures can be made only by people who think in terms of pictures. Paul Leni made an infinitely better picture of *The Cat and Canary* that West did of *The Bat* because he translated into screen terms all the stage stuff that gave *The Bat* its three years in New York. With lights and atmosphere Leni made his picture as thrilling as West made his play, and when West made his picture he translated the play literally, missing all the opportunities that Leni made so much of. If Leni had given *Cat and Canary* the treatment that West gave *The Bat*, it would have been necessary for us to know the solution of the mystery from the first in order to be interested in the unfoldment of the story. But Leni's fine direction made a picture that thrilled me, while all that West accomplished was to bore me. Producers steer shy of mystery stories because they are hard to make interesting. If they let the audience in on the mysteries from the first they could give us a series of thrilling melodramas that would be successful at the box-office. Broadway should teach them that. It is the finest melodrama that I have seen. We now will engage in a few minutes of silent prayer that Henry Hennigson

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* * *

"Spotlight" Excellent Screen Entertainment

PARAMOUNT at last has given Esther Ralston a picture with a thought in it. The Spotlight, directed by Frank Tuttle, is an excellent piece of screen entertainment. In it Miss Ralston gives the best performance of her career, or of as much of her career as I am acquainted with. Nicholas Soussanin, in whom I take a proprietary interest as I was the first to draw public attention to his ability as an actor, contributes a masterly characterization of a theatrical manager, and Neil Hamilton, who always impresses me as having everything a leading man should have, plays opposite Esther and contributes largely to the general excellence of the production. But it is Tuttle's direction that gives this little picture its outstanding qualities, in spite of the high standard of the acting in it. He tells his story in a straightforward way, does not wander far afield for laughs, avoids over-straining to gain a point, and shows an excellent sense of composition. Lighting and photography are effective. In the first sequence we get a glimpse of Arlette Marchal, the beautiful and accomplished French actress whose great talents have been overlooked by Paramount for the two years she has been on its pay-roll. I have seen her in a succession of small parts, for some of which she was not suited, but which as a whole convinced me that she could have become a great favorite if an effort had been made to make her one. Her exhibition of temperament in the opening scene causes Soussanin to boast that he can take any girl and make a great star out of her. To make good the boast he picks up Esther, most unpromising looking material, but the first that he saw. When he begins with her she is Lizzie Stokes, but when he presents her to the public she is Olga Rostova, a famous Russian actress, under which name she scores a tremendous success. As we watch the picture we forget that actresses are made by this deliberate method. Thanks to Tuttle's direction, and the convincing acting of Miss Ralston and Soussanin, the whole thing looks convincing. Neil Hamilton comes on the scene and falls in love with Olga Rostova, and Lizzie Stokes falls in love with him. Her marriage does not suit the plans of her manager, and he tells her that when Hamilton finds out that Olga is Lizzie, he will realize that he has been in love with a person who does not exist. It's a clever story idea, and, as I have said, is told excellently by Tuttle. Although the ultimate outcome has been made obvious by well established motion picture traditions, some suspense is maintained in working out the plot. Miss Ralston, who looks quite attractive in a black wig, gives a very worthy characterization of the Russian actress. It reveals her in a new light. She and Hamilton have one strong scene when he accuses her of playing with his affections for publicity purposes, but most of its force is lost by the manner in which it is screened. All we see of it are the heads of the two characters, who have to put over their quarrel entirely by their facial expressions. I do not understand why some director does not grasp the obvious fact that the public must be tired of seeing enlarged faces on the screen, and that to rely more on full figures would be a pleasing novelty. This quarrel would

have been much more effective if it had been shown in a medium shot taking in the full figures of the two characters and enabling them to register the drama with something besides their faces. I'm getting awfully sick of close-ups.

* * *

Universal's contribution to the prize-fight cycle is *On His Toes*, a Reg Denny picture that will not lose this popular star any friends. The star's characterization is consistent throughout. He does not play the cheerful, grinning Denny we are used to. In this picture he is the spoiled darling of an indulgent grandmother and takes

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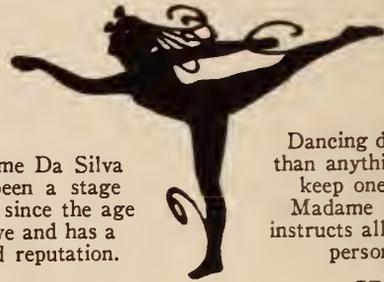
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himself very seriously. It is a definite characterization, and Denny handles it in a way that shows that he knows something about acting. Fred Newmeyer directed. The picture is free from the irritating little faults that so many directors put into their work, and by the enumeration of which I am able to give a picture a full-length review. It takes me just as long to see a faultless picture as it does to see a faulty one, but the latter compensates for its lack of merit by giving me something tangible to write about. When I've said that *On His Toes* is an entertaining little picture, one of the best of the prize-fight series, I've said it all. One thing I might add, though, is that Reg puts it over the rest of the fellows by looking as if he had a right to play a fighter. When the championship bout takes place in this picture we see some real fighting. Mary Carr is splendid as Denny's grandmother, and Laon Ramon, an attractive and clever youngster, starts the picture off well by a spirited interpretation of Denny as a boy. No fight picture with Denny in it would be complete without Hayden Stevenson in it. Stevenson is in this one and contributes a very good performance. Barbara Worth plays the girl.

* * *

Sherwood of Life, Johnston of Motion Picture News, and various other writers well posted on screen conditions, lament the fact that pictures are so bad that stage presentations have to be resorted to to put them over. Even K. C. B., who by virtue of being my older brother—get that OLDER—should know better, based a long article in my Contributors' Number on the same argument. Stage presentations are not offered in downtown houses to compensate for lack of entertainment in pictures, and have nothing to do with their pulling power. There is a tremendous investment in the downtown houses all over the country, and to protect it the public must be lured away from the neighborhood houses. Why should I go downtown to see Gloria Swanson at a cost of sixty-five cents and transportation, when by waiting for two or three weeks I can see her on the next corner for forty cents? To get me to go downtown I must be offered some attraction that I never will be able to see at the next corner. If I want to see Eddie Peabody I must go downtown. His presence in a house showing Gloria's picture is no reflection on the picture.

* * *

A committee of three quite charming extra girls waited on me and discussed with me the free circus which Paramount staged to put in some picture. The young women were indignant, and asked me to become so. They said

that every person who strolled in from the street and occupied a seat at the ringside took a day's pay from an extra. I became indignant. Everything that is put in a picture is sold to the exhibitor and I do not believe that Paramount is justified in getting something for nothing and then selling it. There is in Hollywood a large army of extras who remain here in the hopes of getting enough work to keep them from starving. Their presence is one of the industry's assets. Sensible producers would seek opportunities to hire them, and on no occasion would look for volunteers to take the bread and butter away from them. But have we any sensible producers?

* * *

I clip this from the Film Daily: "Can we ever get away with it?" should never become a popular slogan in production circles. Never should a director who ranks with the best have attempted to include several shots in a current release which would have raised a storm of pro-

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test throughout the length and breadth of the land. Likewise no legitimate reason should ever exist for another director, equally capable, to take one of the best drawing cards in pictures, place him in a house of doubtful reputation and build a doubtful sequence around the incident." One thing that the screen has suffered from has been an overdose of such criticism as this. A paper that lacks the nerve to give the name of anyone it criticizes should keep out of the criticizing business. If the Film Daily will slip me the names of the two directors it is afraid of, I will bawl them out.

* * *

At a Beverly Hills dinner party last week the conversation turned to foreign films. A supervisor connected with one of the big studios contributed largely to the discussion. He never has been abroad, and all the rest of us have, but he expressed his views on European subjects with a finality that left little else to be said. The conversation finally reached *J'Accuse*, that extraordinary French film which Abel Gance made in Paris in 1920, and which was shown in this country the following year, when it made a great impression on those who took an intelligent interest in the screen. Those who saw it will recall that it dealt with those who died in the war rising from their graves to enquire into the reason for it. As the discussion continued the supervisor remained silent. Finally he leaned over to me and enquired in a whisper, "Say, who the hell is Jack Hughes?"

* * *

Dick Arlen, Paramount's most recent young man to be exploited as a great Western star, labors under the slight handicap of not being able to ride a horse. I have been laboring under the impression that that was all a Western star needed to know. Warner Baxter was getting along all right as Jack Holt's successor until one bright morning when they were shooting a scene showing Warner, as a peerless rider, sitting on a horse. The horse moved. Right then and there Warner decided that Westerns were much too rough for him, and he quit. And now Dick is having the same tough time. His double can not be used in the close-ups of him riding, and the camera man must be on the alert to get his riding shots in the short interval that elapses after the horse begins to move and before Arlen falls off.

* * *

One of the queer things about the screen industry is the manner in which it ignores promising talent. The other day I saw a picture directed five years ago by Frederick Stowers, who also wrote the story. It was his first attempt and revealed him as an author and director of marked ability. In it were remarkable characterizations by Noah Beery, Johnny Harron, and Ethel Grey Terry. But the picture never got Stowers anything. It's a great business for overlooking promising material. In any other line of work someone would have seen Stower's possibilities and he would have advanced rapidly.

* * *

Listen to Will Hays: "To me there is but one interest and that is the interest of all of you and of the public you serve, to the end that every individual, every company and every branch of the business may be fixed in its position of certainty that the rights of all are equally sacred and sacredly equal." I imagine that the right of Ray Griffith

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to make a living would come under the heading of "sacred" rights, yet the organization that this flannel-mouthed hypocrite heads is denying Ray that right. Apparently among the things that Hays holds sacred—in fact, much too sacred to use—is sincerity.

* * *

K. C. B. has published a book of the things he writes. If he were not my big brother, two years older than I am—I am sore yet at the woman at the Montmartre who thought I was his father—I would tell you that there is a great deal of tenderness and sweetness in the book; much rich humor and kind philosophy that make you feel better as you read them. It is a splendid little book to give as a Christmas present to someone you like. You can get it at any book store, and it costs only one dollar.

* * *

In shooting Rose Marie Metro is taking liberties with the Canadian mounted police. It shows them getting their men in the province of Quebec. The mounted operate in Canada only west of Manitoba. Provincial police do duty in all other provinces, and even if the mounted trace a man as far as Quebec the case would be handed over to the provincial body. In this picture also Western saddles will be shown in general use in Quebec. Metro seems to be badly in need of the services of a technical man who knows something about Eastern Canada.

* * *

Ever since I received the Loew memorial edition of Variety I have been trying to figure out how I can find language that will express my disgust and at the same time get by the postal authorities. Before the grass grows green over the grave of Marcus Loew Variety persuades motion picture people to pay it three hundred dollars per page to advertise their respect for the memory of a man

most of them never knew. It is ghoulish grafting that is the epitome of rotten taste.

* * *

Saw Eddie Carewe driving on the Boulevard the other day, and a little later saw Louis B. Mayer. Both were riding in cars with large red "fire" signs on them. Eddie and Louis must have been in a hurry when they left their respective studios, for they were not wearing their rompers and red tin helmets, and neither was carrying an axe.

* * *

As a general thing the most satisfactory shots on the screen are those in which the stars do not appear. The minor characters are not shown in close-ups, which make the shots quite refreshing.

* * *

In Back to God's Country there are scenes showing rivers frozen over and snow covering the ground, yet bears are running about. Bears hibernate in winter.

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AS THEY APPEAL TO A YOUTH

By DONALD BEATON — The Spectator's 17-Year-Old Critic

BREAKFAST AT SUNRISE is a pretty poor picture for as big a star as Constance Talmadge. She is clever, and would be a sensation in comedies with a real story; but in frothy little things like this picture, where she has nothing to do but wear pretty clothes and pose around, she will never get anywhere. Mal St. Claire is supposed to be a pretty good comedy director. If he is, he certainly was off his feed in Breakfast at Sunrise. There were three characters in the picture that had nothing to do with the story. Marie Dressler, as a queen of some mythical kingdom, and her two subjects wandered around for no apparent reason. They might just as well have not been in the picture at all. There were some beautiful scenes in Breakfast at Sunrise, the best being the one which was put in for the sole reason of justifying the title. Don Alvarado, who is a very pleasing leading man, and Miss Talmadge were having breakfast in the garden at sunrise. The whole scene was beautifully done. When one figures how much money was spent on Breakfast at Sunrise, and what some poor director who is walking the

streets could have done with that amount, it seems terrible waste. Breakfast at Sunrise certainly hasn't done much for the advancement of art on the screen, and it should be the responsibility of anyone engaged in any art to see that that art is advanced by every piece of work done by him.

ESTHER RALSTON in a black wig is something unusual, also Esther Ralston getting a chance to do any acting. In Spotlight she gets a chance at both and does fairly well. As a picture, Spotlight is quite pleasing. The finished acting of Nicholas Soussanin is the big feature of the picture. The direction, by Frank Tuttle, was very well done. Soussanin, as the stage magnate, was not allowed to fall out of character at all. Only once did the director let him waver in his characterization. There was one scene where I thought he was going to make love to Esther Ralston, which was absolutely out of his character. That was partly Soussanin's fault, because at times his emotions are hard to understand. In one scene,

Esther Ralston was feeding swans in a Public Park, dressed in a get-up which would have gathered a crowd that would have filled the park. She was attracting no attention, however. The only things wrong with the picture were small and unimportant, and on the whole it was pretty good. The hero got over his surprise very quickly at the fact that the Russian he had fallen in love with was really an American girl. He proposed to her just the same, only a few minutes after he had found that out. He would have waited at least a day or so to make up his mind. Neil Hamilton did as well as he usually does as the hero of the piece. Arlette Marchal was on the screen for just a short time, but she was very good.

REELS and reels of nothing but Billie Dove's beauty can get tiresome when there is nothing else to the picture, which fact is proved by the American Beauty. It is one of those pictures in which the faults are hard to pick out. On the way home from the theater, I had to ask my sister just why I didn't like it. The story was impossible, and the action dragged until it almost put one to sleep. Jack Wagner was put down as the comedy constructor. If the gags in The American Beauty were

part of his comedy construction, then he should have asked to have his name not given on the screen. The attempts at humor in the picture were wooden and uninteresting; the characters were not human; and the whole thing was impossible. I liked *The American Beauty* because it gave me a chance to see Alice White again. Her work in *Breakfast at Sunrise* was clever, as is her performance in this picture. She is a type, but just the same she should go far on the screen. Walter McGrail is another favorite of mine. His work is always so perfectly done. Lloyd Hughes was the leading man. Edythe Chapman, who had only a small part that was far from in keeping with her talents, was also in the cast. I would like to see her on the screen more often.

THERE isn't much that can be said for *The Fair Co-ed*. The story was the usual impossible one that most of Marion Davies' stories are. The whole story was built around a girls' basketball team which had a man for a coach. A man would never coach a girls' basketball team. He was apparently a student, too. The whole college got wildly excited about a basketball game between two girls' teams. That was absurd, because no college would get all excited about a basketball game during football season. The story took place during football season because Marion Davies came to the college at the beginning of the fall term. The idea of the student body having a rally for just a mere basketball game was also silly. The whole thing was silly like that and made the picture poor. There were some good touches of humor in *The Fair Co-ed*, the chief one being the parade of vehicles in protest against the prohibition of cars at college. Joe Farnham's titles were very good.

THE only good thing in *The Forbidden Woman* is the ending. When Jetta Goudal was before the firing squad in one of the final scenes, I was terribly afraid that the old, time-worn stunt of having a pardon come at the last minute was going to be rung in as the final atrocity of the picture. Paul Stein's direction of *The Forbidden Woman* was very poor. There were too many situations that were very old. Joseph Schildkraut was attempting to make the acquaintance of Jetta Goudal, who was standing against the rail of the ship with a funny looking vest over her regular dress and some mosquito-netting on her head. He made her acquaintance by getting caught in the netting. Instead of smashing him, she gave him a smile. She should have known better, because he immediately began making violent love to her. That was absurd, because no sane human being would have started in quite so precipitately. The whole picture gave the impression of being technically incorrect. I don't know anything about the French army, but

it seems funny that an order, which the commanding officer had to sign, could have been signed just as well by another officer, even if he was senior to the commander. One of the main things in the picture that got on my nerves was the wardrobe that Jetta Goudal had to wear. She looked like an animated ragbag. The only bright spot in the picture was the work of Victor Varconi. He possesses one of the most likeable personalities in pictures, besides having no small talent as an actor. To see him on the screen is to like him immediately. To my mind, if Jetta Goudal is starring material, he certainly is. I had finished this article, but Dad came in and said that he thought *The Forbidden Woman* was very good. He knows more about pictures than any man in the world, but, like the man who jumped out of the airplane without putting on his parachute, he has made a rather serious mistake.

THE independent producers are soon to be "the" producers. Instead of getting players under contract and then devoting their energies to fighting with them and trying to break the contracts, they sign up their casts by the picture. Thus they save money and get the right people for the right parts. The big studios are letting out so many contract players that a lot of the big names are going into independent productions. There they are paid what they ask, and are not hampered with a lot of quarrels with low-brow producers. The big studios being under the delusion that they are entirely self-sufficient, do not realize that if they keep on letting out contract players and the players go to the independents, the public will leave their pictures and go to the independents too, and by the time the big studios get their new players popular, the independents will be in power. *The Port of Missing Girls* is an independent production with a cast such as I have mentioned. Barbara Bedford, whom I like on the screen tremendously, headed a strong cast. The picture was directed by a very good director, Irving Cummings. The sets were good, and there wasn't anything cheap-looking about it, but I dare say it cost a good deal less than a picture of that type would at one of the big studios. There was nothing seriously the matter with *The Port of Missing Girls*, but there were many little things. The girl's

father rushed right into a radio broadcasting studio and started to talk over the radio. In a real studio he would never have gotten away with that. Also, the "school" in the picture was too raw to have lasted a day. If the independents would pick a little less ponderous subjects for stories, their pictures would be better.

THERE were some queer things in *East Side, West Side*. George O'Brien decided to end his life in a blaze of glory, so he started through town wrecking speak-easies. Hitherto, he had been shown as a very upright young man who never took a drink. How, in his drinkless condition, he managed to know so many speak-easies is a mystery to me. At another time the subway where he was working started to cave in. He held it up while the workmen got to safety. It was all right as a feat of strength, but it didn't ring true on the screen. At another place he jumped out of the back of a truck and everybody who wasn't doing anything around that neighborhood proceeded to jump on him and beat him up. That also scarcely rang true. In the ship which sank, the boy's father sood calmly by the rail and let himself be drowned. He made no attempt to save himself. The whole picture was honeycombed with just such things as that, and as a result, wasn't very good. The work of George O'Brien was the best thing in the picture. In his more serious scenes he was a pleasant surprise, as I did not imagine he could act like he did.

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STORY of the BOX-OFFICE

By NORMAN WEBB

IN A recent editorial on the cover of one of the industry's leading trade papers the editor went to great lengths to tell how much better the New York picture theatres and the prologues they presented were than those of the Los Angeles theatres. He literally "razed" the local theatres and especially the presentations of their larger first run and road show houses.

While I will admit that some of our presentations are just a trifle too long to suit me, they are successful at the box-office as an aid in helping to put weak pictures over and after all that is what counts. And yet, regardless of how good a picture is, there isn't a prologue in a hundred that can not be considered an aid in getting the money into the box-office. A snappy presentation or a picturesque prologue is the very thing to get the audience in the right frame of mind to receive any picture, as has been proven time and time again.

This "certain editor" went to great pains telling how terrible it was to have to sit through a Sid Grauman or a Fred Miller-Jack Laughlin prologue in order to see a certain picture. He brought forth the false argument that the New York method of just throwing open the doors and starting the picture right off the bat was so much more successful than the Los Angeles prologue idea.

As a matter of comparison he stated that The Big Parade in conjunction with Sid Grauman's prologue only held out twenty-seven weeks in Los Angeles while in New York it ran almost two years—ninety-five weeks to be exact—without any prologue. But he forgot to mention that the theatre-drawing population of New York is approximately eight million five hundred thousand against one million one hundred thousand in Los Angeles. In other words in order to equalize the Grauman's Egyptian run the New York stand would have to be four years and two months in accordance with the population of the cities, while as a matter of fact it was less than half. More power to that master showman Sid Grauman and his popular prologues.

In the four and a half years that Grauman presided over the Egyptian Theatre he presented only twelve different pictures, which averages the runs to about twenty weeks each, or only about two and a half new pictures a year. Some record, to say the least, for a city of this size. And of all these bookings only two, The Covered Wagon and The Ten Commandments outran The Big Parade and both these pictures cost more than twice as much to film as The Big Parade.

And speaking of Los Angeles and prologues, it is interesting to note how

Abe Erlanger and the McCarthy booking-office grilled Ben Hur here last fall in its local run at the Biltmore theatre. Grauman had signed an optional contract for the run of this production at his Egyptian theatre with a guarantee of an eight months' run, which approximately would have netted at least three hundred thousand dollars to the M-G-M Distributing Corporation.

When Erlanger learned that Grauman was planning a spectacular prologue to precede Ben Hur he told Grauman that he would only sell him the picture, Ben Hur, and not any costly prologues or the name of Grauman's Egyptian theatre. Grauman told Erlanger that he would think it over and he went right then straight to United Artists' office and bought Mary Pickford's Sparrows and Doug Fairbanks' Black Pirate for a double feature bill to supplant the supposed Ben Hur run.

Accordingly, Erlanger only had one alternative—to put Ben Hur in his Los Angeles Biltmore theatre, which he eventually did. Considering this great spectacle and all the publicity it had received, the Biltmore theatre run without a prologue was more or less of a failure, only lasting sixteen weeks and grossing approximately two hundred and sixty thousand dollars, of which the net could not have been more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars or less than half of what the Grauman run would have netted. In other words Erlanger's trying to tell Grauman how to run his theatre for the Ben Hur showing was an out-and-out loss to the M-G-M corporation of at least one hundred and fifty thousand dollars cash, plus an additional fifty thousand dollars loss in exploitation value.

Many prominent people in film circles were greatly disappointed when their ideal premier theatre, Grauman's Egyptian, was turned into a second run house last August. When I heard the news I grabbed Sid Grauman at a meeting of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He told me that while the theatre still had his name he no longer had anything to do with the operation of it as it was now being operated by West Coast, and that he was devoting his entire time to the new Chinese theatre. On calling the West Coast offices, I was informed that the Egyptian theatre was now to be considered a first run Hollywood theatre. This struck me as rather funny. If we are to have a first run in Hollywood, why not in Beverly Hills, Culver City, Gardner Junction, Watts, or what have you? Since Hollywood and Los Angeles are one and the same, Grauman's Egyptian, once the most publicized theatre in the country, is now considered a second run house by the populace, and the difference is certainly seen in the gross business. While Grauman oper-

ated this house it played to an average gross business of twenty thousand dollars weekly and now it is only doing about half that, from around nine thousand five hundred dollars to eleven thousand dollars weekly with no signs of building any higher.

In a way this seems too bad when we consider the great shortage of road-show houses in Los Angeles. Since the Forum has been transferred into a combination vaudeville and picture house, Grauman's Chinese and Miller's Carthay Circle are the only two available road-show houses.

* * *

Grauman's Chinese now holds the same high place that the Egyptian formerly did only it is more modern and is also capable of doing a little bigger gross business since it has three hundred more seats than the Egyptian. Fred Miller's Carthay theatre is building better both in presentation and average gross business than any other road-show house in the country. But why shouldn't it? Not because it is a beautiful theatre and ideally located, for there are many such houses, but because of the management. The Miller Brothers, Fred and Roy, are Los Angeles' real pioneer showmen. And they have had many tough deals in the past, first with the old California theatre on Eighth and Main, and then with the Figueroa theatre, but they have struck it right with the Carthay Circle under its present operating policy. In the year and a half that this theatre has been open Fred Miller has only found it necessary to book in four features, which is just as good a record as Grauman's. Not only is Fred Miller a master booker, but his Jack Laughlin prologue-Carli Elinor orchestra combination is one that cannot be beaten. His exploitation methods and first night premiers are recognized to be of much importance to the industry. With the Carthay Circle running Loves of Carmen and Sunrise to follow, this theatre is practically tied up for a year by Fox.

With Sid Grauman running Douglas Fairbanks' The Gaucho at his Chinese Theatre, these two road-show houses are completely tied up, while there are many big theatreless attractions that are available now, or that will be in the near future, including such pictures as The Student Prince, The Patent Leather Kid, The Trail of '98, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. Rex Ingram's The Garden of Allah was presented in New York during the early part of October as a road-show attraction at the Embassy Theatre, but during its run it did such a poor business (finally giving place to Marion Davies' production, Quality Street), and it also had such bad criticisms that M.-G.-M. probably will not have the nerve to road-show it throughout the country, but will try to sell it as a special when it really should be a program release.

While The Volga Boatman run lasted but five weeks in New York, the Carthay Circle had a very successful

nineteen week run—practically four times as long. *What Price Glory* played to twenty-six weeks business as a road-show in both New York and Los Angeles, but the Los Angeles gross for the same period at the Carthay Circle was much larger. *What Price Glory* got its real break in New York when it grossed four hundred and eight thousand dollars in its three weeks' run at the Roxy. But, of course, it was accompanied by a presentation at this theatre.

* * *

Seventh Heaven, accompanied by the Fox movietone, had a poor fifteen week first run in New York, and yet locally, at the Carthay Circle, accompanied by Laughlin's masterful prologue, it played to a strong twenty-three weeks and could have run on another month at a good profit, if it were not for the advanced booking. On the Seventh Heaven run the Carthay Circle averaged \$17,000 weekly against a \$9,000 average weekly gross at the Harris theatre in New York, or almost twice as much.

It is true these road-shows all got \$2.20 top in New York and only \$1.65 top here, yet the weekly gross figures here are all much higher. And still some critics say: "To hell with prologues and presentations!"

While we are not necessarily boosting the way that West Coast are running Grauman's Egyptian, the new West Coast regime, and particularly Harold Franklin, Jack Mansfield and Geoff Lazarus, are to be congratulated on the success they are having with their first run weekly change houses, not only in Los Angeles but also in Portland, Seattle, and especially San Francisco, where three practically dead houses, the St. Francis, the Cali-

fornia and the Imperial have been brought back to life.

* * *

The pooling of the Los Angeles and San Francisco Publix theatres with the West Coast theatres has been a very successful arrangement for all concerned. The Metropolitan in Los Angeles with bigger prologues and booking on the open market has been averaging much better than it ever has before, while Loew's State has been holding fairly well, although the absence of Gene Morgan has certainly cost this house plenty.

Turning the Uptown into a second run house and making the Boulevard the uptown first run house with Abe Lyman as master of ceremonies should prove a good move for the box-office. When Abe was at the Uptown the earlier part of this year the house only averaged \$12,000 weekly, while indications are that he will average a good \$14,000 or \$15,000 weekly gross at the Boulevard, providing West Coast and Louis Golden use good judgment in booking their feature attractions.

The two long-run houses, the Million Dollar and the Criterion, have been holding up very well on the strength of their special features. The Million Dollar is becoming more and more handicapped because of its poor location since this town has taken a notion to grow west of Seventh Street. This, of course, is an aid to the Criterion, which should help make up for the unpopularity of the orchestra leader at that theatre, who has a habit of playing on without applause until he becomes boresome. However, we must give him credit for amusing the film colony on first nights by sending big baskets of flowers to himself!

had varied experiences on top of their newspaper and story training and their knowledge of picture technique, who are ignored. It would be a simple matter for studio executives to avail themselves of this ready talent without any added cost while at the same time encouraging fresh ideas from a source now lying dormant.

There are press agents who are college men; these men can be used to good advantage during the writing and making of a college story. There are press agents who served in the world war; an invitation to them might elicit one worth-while idea, certainly it could do no harm. During their newspaper training these boys have been spectators in many phases



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THE LOWLY PRESS AGENT

Dear Mr. Beaton:

These many years the press agent has been in a state of obloquy. His title has been uttered with contumely and he has generally been considered as something worse than a necessary evil, an unmentionable caudal extremity. But it seems to me that as a whole these gentlemen of the press, who act as mediators between the motion picture industry and the public, are an intelligent and worthy crew. As a class they have done their work as well, and in many cases better, than any other cinematic sect.

A glance at the list of ex-press agents who have risen from the ranks will surprise those individuals who captain the industry's destinies. But being a press agent seems a sort of leprosy and producers never think of them as an intelligent and valuable part of the business. It seems to me that a system, such as used in the army and navy during wartime, whereby the varied and diverse talents of the press agent is used to best advantage, will not only uncover some

much needed talent, but also increase the deplorable lack of studio brains.

If, for example, an artist enters the army, he is placed in the camouflage section; if he is a mathematician he is placed in the artillery; etcetera, etcetera. There are press agents who have been in the motion picture business for many years. They have had ample time to observe and study production. They have seen strange things happen to good stories and they have stood by, inarticulate by force of circumstances, and watched blunders being made. Their very business of press agency proves that they can write. Many of them were important editors, some of them are now magazine and syndicate writers, and some are novelists; they have a proven story sense and this, plus their experience in the studios, should make them highly useful members of a motion picture making company.

Often a nondescript creature known as a technical director is hired at a high salary and twice as often his advice goes unheeded. There are men in the publicity departments who have

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is writing something or other—
I don't know what.

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of life; why not use their writing ability, their picture knowledge, and their particular experience in some walk of life? I can name a dozen men in the press agent ranks who will some day be important contributors to production fields. I can not name any producers who will be wise enough to scour their particular departments now and grab them while they can.

JOE STEELE.

GARBLED EUROPE

Dear Mr. Beaton:

The following comments on *Twelve Miles Out* will serve as an opportunity to point out how the incorrectness of European cities, as shown on the screen, strikes people who know the actual scenes.

The Spanish sequence:

Costumes—The man who fights with Torrence in the Cafe in San Sebastian, looks like an Argentine tango dancer or the foreman of a big Argentine ranch. We also see a man in a "Gauchó" costume, which is what the Argentine cowboys are called. Some are dressed as Mexicans and others as cowboys of Mexico. The waiter is dressed as though he were waiting in a big Parisian Cafe, when as a matter of fact the cafe as shown is supposed to be very rough and crude.

The man who leaves Torrence at the table to pay the bill, reminds us of a Valencian or a man from the mountain districts by the clothes he wears. A native of the mountainous districts would change his clothing to conform to the city in which he was staying. In fact, this man appears to be one who lived permanently in San Sebastian and not a mountaineer. Then again, one of the girls is dressed as a Neapolitan.

Types—Apparently no regard was paid to casting correctly, as the types appear to follow the rule that as a Spaniard is dark, any dark complexioned person is proper for a Spanish story. As a matter of fact, the men

from this part of Spain are a distinct type, blonde, very husky and good looking, not the light chocolate types that were used, all of whom appeared to be sickly Mexicans. It is a well known fact that the men and women of this district, San Sebastian, are blonde, the men having ruddy complexions.

Sets—The cafe appears to have been an old stock set, used, most likely, in Mexican and South American stories. Nothing typically Spanish appears in it. One thing that would have made it more realistic in a cafe of this type would have been marble topped tables.

According to this story, San Sebastian is a little port situated on the Mediterranean. We could say with as much truth that San Francisco is a small smuggling port on the Atlantic. San Sebastian is located, not on the Mediterranean, but on the "Mar Cantabrico" on the Atlantic. San Sebastian instead of being a small seaport village is one of the most aristocratic beaches in the world. The King of Spain goes there for two or three months every year, making it the summer capitol of Spain.

The producer who states that no one will know the difference, should realize that San Sebastian is as fashionably known and visited as Deauville, Biarritz, Nice and the Lido, just outside Venice.

The French, Germans, Italians, people from South America, South Africa, India, and in fact a very

large number from this country, go there every season.

It would not have been a question of spending more money to have the types, costumes and sets correct, but merely a question of research, the use of a native of Spain and not some American who perhaps spent five hours in Madrid and saw picture post-cards of San Sebastian.

The effect on any one seeing a city they know incorrectly depicted, is similar to meeting a bad case of halitosis. Showing the Rocky Mountains in New York Harbor, with Mississippi River steamboats plying up and down the Hudson, or Brooklyn shown as the Sahara Desert would be just as authentic as the way San Sebastian is shown.

This is not the only incorrect picture made by this company showing scenes in Spain. Valencia is another example, which, according to Spanish critics, has nothing in it that looks like Spain.

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Murnau and Rosher Are "Sunrise" Heroes

SUNRISE in some respects marks the farthest spot the screen has reached in its progress as a developing art. F. W. Murnau, the director, and Charles Rosher, the chief cameraman, are the heroes. A great deal of the direction is inspired, and all of the photography is of a quality that gives the screen a new dignity as an art. It is a picture that is of tremendous value to Hollywood as a subject for study. Also it is interesting as the first production in this country of the man who sent us the epochal *Last Laugh*. Another point of interest is that it comes from the lot that gave us *Seventh Heaven*, another important picture directed by a man who was making pictures here before we began to notice the foreigners. From every standpoint *Sunrise* is important quite apart from its claim to consideration for the merits it possesses. Within his marked limitations Murnau is a director extraordinarily skilled in the use of the tools he works with. He deems the camera to be possessed of story-telling powers, and in making this picture he was fortunate in having at his command in Rosher a master of photography. He puts into his scenes a pictorial quality that matches their moods. I do not think the screen has shown us anything more sublimely beautiful than the shot of the sailboat leaving the shore after Janet Gaynor and George O'Brien have had their celebration in the city. The dissolving shots planting the spirit of vacation time possess the same rich quality in addition to being interesting as camera tricks. Murnau's direction demonstrates a point that I have urged constantly: that close-ups are a detriment to a picture unless inserted only when there are demands for them. Some of his most dramatic scenes are presented in deep-medium or long shots. This is logical treatment. The sets were erected with such scenes in mind; the lighting was arranged to preserve the moods of the scenes, the cameras placed and the characters grouped all for the purpose of building them up. As a consequence the scenes could be presented perfectly only to the extent that they presented all the features that were necessary to them. When a character's position in relation to another character is important to a scene some of its strength is lost when the other character is eliminated to allow the first to be shown in a close-up. Murnau gives us a few close-ups and each of them is necessary. In my opinion the most intelligent shot is that showing O'Brien terrifying Margaret Livingstone near the end of the picture. Because she had urged him to drown Janet, O'Brien, when he thinks Janet has been drowned, becomes infuriated and seeks the city woman with murder in his heart. When he encounters her the light is at his back and we can not see his face. Nor can we see Margaret's as she advances towards him with her back to the camera. But we see her lift her face to his, then turn and flee. There is a shot for our close-up hounds to study! I do not know of any other director who could have resisted showing us George's face distorted with rage and Margaret's registering terror. Murnau's treatment shows that such shots are unnecessary, as he uses the complete bodies of his characters to put over his drama. As soon as Margaret flees we know that the expression on George's face must have terrified her, and seeing the expression in a close-up would have told us no more than we learned by not seeing it. Another bit of

direction that I like is holding the camera on O'Brien for the entire time he is rowing frantically to the shore after recovering from the insanity of his idea of drowning his wife. There is drama in every stroke he makes, and Murnau sustains the drama by showing us all the strokes. All through the picture there are such examples of great intelligence applied to direction.

* * *

But What Do We Get for All the Art?

BUT what is the net result of the masterly direction and the superb photography? Murnau has used his tools as skilfully as a master sculptor uses his chisels, and gives us something as cold as the marble that the sculptor uses. There is not a heart-throb in *Sunrise*. What is a motion picture? Is it an unfeeling thing of camera angles, lighting, sets and photography, like *Sunrise*, or a throbbing, living, human thing, like *Seventh Heaven*? One of the tools that Murnau used he passed to the hand of Frank Borzage: Janet Gaynor. In *Sunrise* her husband is about to drown her, and as I view the scene I admire the direction and wonder how the camera was anchored; in *Seventh Heaven* her husband is about to go to war and as I view the scene I cry, and a lump hurts my throat, and I can feel the spell of it again now as my pen pauses. I did not admire Borzage's direction, nor was I concerned with the camera. I forgot that I was looking at a motion picture, something that Murnau did not allow me to forget for a moment. As an object to dissect in a screen clinic *Sunrise* is a masterpiece; as a motion picture it is not great. When Borzage directed Janet Gaynor he explained the scenes to her, toying with her emotions until she was pathetic little Diane, and then allowed her to act the scenes as she wished, for having submerged her own personality completely in that of the character, all of the manifestations of the character's moods must of necessity be perfect acting. I would gather from *Sunrise* that Murnau used Janet to interpret his conception of her scenes, and did not permit her to become in reality the character she was depicting. I imagine he treated George O'Brien in the same way, but I have not the opportunity to make a comparison. Murnau's direction reflects Germanic arrogance. His players are chessmen, and he moves them as such. When O'Brien regains Janet's confidence in him, he tucks her under his arm and the two sidle along the sidewalk in a ludicrously unnatural way that would have made pedestrians pause in amazement and stare at them. Yet no one notices them. The ridiculous posture and gait are maintained until the two seat themselves in a cafe, again without creating the sensation that the entrance of two such grotesque creatures could not help creating. In the cafe sequence, though, we got our only glimpse of the real Janet Gaynor, just a flash when she rises after drinking wine. Again in the barber shop we have an entirely unnatural scene. Arthur Houseman seats himself beside

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Janet and begins to flirt with her in a manner so crude that it would have provoked the instant protest of every barber in the place. The spectacle of a couple married for four years stopping traffic while they embrace in the middle of the street is another one of the examples of straight movie stuff that rob the picture of all its wonderful opportunities to be poignantly human. Murnau is cold, too cold ever to give us a truly great picture. He makes two of his characters advance along the sidewalk like a pair of crabs and tells us that it is art. He puts an impossible wig on the character who should get most of our sympathy, presents her throughout as both physically and mentally unattractive and gives the impression of ordering us to worry about her because he, the mastermind, so commands. Extraordinary direction and beautiful photography are no greater in a picture than the emotions they arouse. A man who can make us cry is a greater director than one who only makes us think. When we go to a theatre we do not wish to be lectured on the art of picture-making; we wish to laugh and to cry, to become distressed over the tribulations of poor Nell, and to develop an intense hatred for the villain. In *Sunrise* Murnau gives an extraordinary exhibition of motion picture mechanics, but he ignores the only important thing: the soul of a motion picture.

* * *

Some Faults That Murnau Commits

A COMBINATION of the Murnau mechanics and the Borzage humanity would have made *Sunrise* the greatest picture of all time. The German does not seem to understand people. If *Sunrise* had been released before *Seventh Heaven* it would not have established Janet Gaynor as an actress. Her characterization will not be popular throughout the world and will add nothing to her reputation. At the same time I do not believe there is anyone in Hollywood who could have done better in the part. Under Borzage's direction I believe her performance would have ranked with the one she gives in *Seventh Heaven*. There is everything in the role to awaken the deepest sympathy for the neglected wife, but although I am absurdly susceptible to the screen's emotional appeal, I was not moved in the slightest way by one of Janet's scenes. I believe George O'Brien's characterization was too much in monotone. We are given no opportunity of becoming acquainted with him. Perhaps it would have been easier to awaken our sympathy for his wife if we had seen him as something other than a sulky, furtive weakling, badly in need of a shave. If we are to judge their home life by what we see of it in the opening sequence, it is possible that we might view drowning as an easy way out for Janet. The opening shot of the home should have shown a happy family group, O'Brien and Janet at supper, that delicious baby in a high chair, and Bodil Rosing—what a splendid actress she reveals herself to be in this picture!—hovering about to lend an air of peace and contentment to the scene. Then the luring whistle of the woman of the city and the spilling of something in the baby's lap to take the women from the scene, allowing O'Brien to make his escape and wreck the happiness of the home which had been planted as a happy one. I would have shown George treating the flirtation with Margaret Livingstone rather lightly until his passion for her had

been aroused, and then I would have brought on the drowning suggestion with a suddenness that would have staggered him. The transition from the happy home to the diabolical plot to ruin it would have been dramatic. As Murnau presents the sequence to us, we have a stupid clod in an unhappy home, a youth so dull and such putty in Margaret's hands that it is no triumph for her to bend him to her will. As we see him, her passion for him is not convincing. I can not understand how such an attractive girl could love such an unattractive man. And every time he kissed her I was wondering what his beard was doing to her face. Showing him so badly in need of a shave merely to lead up to the barber shop sequence which has no place in the picture, even though it is done very well, is a rather ridiculous straining for an effect. Another unconvincing scene is the storm which overturns the boat. No storm on any lake ever acted like that one. When a wind lashes a lake the waves come in orderly sequence. In no way could a solitary wave like the one that swamps the boat be produced. It was good direction, though, to show us the storm first in the city. It makes us wonder what is happening on the lake. The capsizing scene should have shown the lovers so happy in an embrace that they neglected the sail, which catches the full fury of the first blow and overturns the boat. That is the way it would have happened, and we would have been spared the absurd waves. When the men are searching the lake for Janet's body they should not hold the lanterns below their faces. They could see nothing with the lights shining in their eyes. But *Sunrise* is a most worthy effort, despite its faults, and Fox is to be commended for making it. It will not be a box office winner. One thing I like about it is the opportunity it gives Margaret Livingstone to do something worthy of her ability. She is a splendid actress, but has not been given many chances to prove it. *Seventh Heaven* was so rich in humanity that it ran twenty-two weeks at the Carthay Circle. *Sunrise* is so lacking in that quality that it will not run more than eight weeks.

* * *

"Wild Geese" a Great Picture

D ESPITE the diligent efforts of Tiffany to ruin it with close-ups, *Wild Geese* comes to the screen as one of the most impressive pictures of the year. If we may absolve Phil Stone from blame for the close-ups we must credit him with having done an outstanding directorial job. He has taken a story as drab as that of *White Gold* and told it with a vividness and a sense of drama that grips the viewer as not more than one in a hundred pictures manages to do. His greatest achievement is the evenness of the performances. It is acted superbly throughout. Its locale is a farming community, with most of the scenes on the poorly equipped farm of Russell Simpson. The story has to do with Simpson, Belle Bennett, his wife; Eve Southern, their daughter; Wesley Barry, their son; Anita Stewart, a schoolteacher; Donald Keith, a farm boy in love with Eve, and Jason Robards, Miss Bennett's illegitimate son, in love with Miss Stewart. Simpson is miserly to the point of fanaticism, and rules his family with a refined cruelty that makes him feared and hated. His performance is a remarkable one, by long odds the greatest that I ever have seen him give. He was directed with great intelligence. He inflicts no

physical cruelty on the cowering members of his family, dominating them mentally with a severity and heartlessness that he depicts with consummate artistry, without once resorting to obvious histrionics. Simpson is not one of our outstanding headliners, but I can not think of any actor on the screen who could have given a finer performance than his. Belle Bennett, as the chief victim of the husband's persecution, has to her credit in this picture one of the most perfect performances ever presented on the screen by a woman. There is tragedy in her every expression, in her gait, and the droop of her shoulders; in her very attitude as she stands over the stove and cooks her family's meals. And Eve Southern! If this picture had come from one of the big studios and were shown in the big houses, it would give this young woman a place among the handful of girls who know how to act. In *The Gaucho* she is all spiritual; in *Wild Geese* she has that same haunting spiritual quality, but she has come to life. She is the one member of the family who rebels against the father's harshness, and defies him until each rebellion is terminated by the power of his will. I do not remember having seen Miss Southern in other than the two parts I have mentioned, but I have seen quite enough to satisfy me that her screen career will be a brilliant one if she be given half a chance. She has something that no other girl on the screen has. I commend her to any producer who has a part for a girl with youth, beauty, brains and spirituality. Anita Stewart has little to do in *Wild Geese*, but she takes her place in the mosaic of perfect acting. Donald Keith is an engaging youngster, and in this picture which has few light moments in it, he gives a convincing and understanding performance. Robards and Barry do the same. There are in it also a couple of youngsters, who round out the family of Simpson and Miss Bennett, and their acting preserves the atmosphere of the picture. Only a few of the productions that I have seen this year achieved the high degree of acting that makes *Wild Geese* notable. Such performances are possible in all pictures, but we must have directors who can produce them. Phil Stone certainly knows how to do it. I don't know him, and can't recall having seen anything else that he directed, but this one picture is quite enough to convince me that he ranks among our best directors.

* * *

Phil Stone Does a Wonderful Job

YOU will gather from what I have said thus far about *Wild Geese* that it is the story of a family, not of one or two individuals, and that the drab background is part of it. In fact, as in *White Gold*, the background is in reality the menace. The picture has no star, consequently it was not up to the director to keep any player before the camera to the exclusion of another. In not one place in the entire production is an individual close-up justifiable, yet we have scores of them. It was with a feeling of pity that I watched what might have been a superb exhibition of screen art being ruined by the editing of someone who did not know that the story had a soul. Every scene should have preserved as much of the background as possible, and we never should have lost the idea that the family was an entity. But when the father, mother, and daughter come together in one of the most dramatic scenes in the picture, all we see of it is the annoy-

ing darting of the camera from one large face to another. It is a scene in which we should have seen the entire bodies of all three players for its full length and they should have acted it with their arms, legs, and backs, not only with their lips and eyes. If we condone the presence of so many close-ups there is not a single fault that can be found with Stone's direction, but if he had omitted them and told his story entirely in medium and long shots he would have to his credit to-day a picture that would have been on every list of the ten best of the year. But even with all his close-ups Stone has given us a truer motion picture than Murnau does in *Sunrise*. The Murnau production was long in the making, undoubtedly cost ten times what *Wild Geese* cost, and proclaims itself as a "song of two humans". It is mounted superbly, has an outstanding cast, extraordinary direction, and magnificent photography—and it left me unmoved. *Wild Geese* comes from a small lot, modestly and with no blare of trumpets, yet every foot of it gripped me, and it gripped the audience so tensely that when Russell Simpson disappeared in the mud of the swamp there was a great burst of applause that meant relief. The menace to the happiness of the family was removed, the spectre of a scandal disappeared in the slime with the man responsible for it, the suffering of Belle Bennett and Eve Southern was over, and the audience rejoiced. In my review of *Sunrise* I ask what a motion picture is. *Wild Geese* answers the question. Even though it is not as good as it might have been, it still may be too good for the bulk of the public, therefore I hazzard no guess as to how it will fare with the public, but if I were a producer I would rather have it to my credit than to have made *Sunrise*. The latter may be the song of two humans, but *Wild Geese* is the imposing anthem of a whole family. It demonstrates what every person who brings intelligence to bear on pictures knows, that great sets, milling mobs, and freak photography do not make motion pictures. What the public wants on the screen is a collection of human beings. We have the writers in Hollywood who can put human beings in their stories, men and women who can act them, and a few directors who know how to handle them, but still we rarely see a good picture because producers and supervisors who know nothing of either stories, acting or directing will not permit those who have that knowledge to display it on the screen. I do not know where *Wild Geese* will play in Los Angeles, but you should see it and study it. To *The Spectator's* growing list of exhibitor readers I commend it as one of the best pictures of the year.

* * *

"Blood Ship" Has Much to Its Credit

THE BLOOD SHIP is a worthwhile picture. It is elemental, and it does us good to get down to the bedrock of human emotions once in a while. The commonest effort that is made to reach it confines itself to coming as close to elemental sexual passion as the censors will allow. Columbia had the good fortune to hit on something that it could make as raw as it liked without coming within the sphere of action of the censor boards. There is not a great deal of art in the production in addition to that for which the cameraman was responsible, and the picture is not as good as it could have been, but I enjoyed every minute of it. George B. Seitz's generally

excellent direction is marred frequently by the evidence that he displays that most of his grouping was done with regard for the camera. He got away from it in most of his long shots, but in his medium shots and close-ups he was too painstaking in his efforts to keep all his characters facing the camera, a common fault and one that makes scenes unnatural. Technically the picture is not what it should have been. Walter James, who plays Captain Swope excellently, is shown making a cat-o'-nine-tails, the thongs so heavily burdened with metal that an experimental blow with it makes deep abrasions in the surface of a table, yet later he lashes Hobart Bosworth with it until he is completely exhausted, yet Bosworth's shirt is not torn. The blows he delivered with such a weapon would have killed Bosworth, which is demonstrated later when Bosworth kills James with the same weapon. James is picked up the moment he dies and his body is as stiff as a ramrod. Rigor mortis seems to have set in with extraordinary promptness. While I have no quarrel with the critics who were so generous in their praise of Bosworth's performance, I feel that they did not do full justice to the excellent work of all the members of the cast. Quite as commendable as Bosworth's performance are those of James and Fred Kohler, both of whom inject a callosity into their cruelty in a masterly manner. Dick Arlen's pleasing screen personality registers agreeably, but I can't see that he contributes anything to the story except providing Jacqueline Logan with someone to love, a necessary ingredient, I'll grant you, but in such a gory picture we might have had a more bloodthirsty hero. James Bradbury, as the Knitting Swede, gave me a glimpse of a character man I never noticed before. Someone should give him a chance in a bigger part. Miss Logan takes full advantage of the few opportunities her part provides. I am quite sure that she will give a good account of herself in all the important roles De Mille has in sight for her. Arthur Rankin is capital in a small character part. He is one of the best young character men we have. Syd Crossley is listed as a Cockney, but his spoken titles are about as far from the Cockney dialect as they could get. However, his acting is excellent. There is a colored gentleman in *The Blood Ship* cast who rejoices in the name of Blue Washington, and who certainly can act. As I watched his appearances on the screen I wondered why producers do not provide more prominent parts for negroes and cast in them some of the excellent colored talent available. Quite often we see white men playing blackface parts, which becomes ridiculous when you consider how many clever fellows we have who could play them without make-up. Columbia is to be congratulated upon giving us such a stirring picture as this one. I suppose the fact that it is attracting attention will be responsible for an epidemic of such pictures, none of which will be as good as the original. That's the way it generally is.

* * *

"Crowd" Subjected to Too Much Supervision

THE happiest ending a picture can have is one showing a sympathetic character achieving an ambition. Things in life are relative. We can derive as much satisfaction from watching Chico in *Seventh Heaven* rise from a sewer cleaner to a street washer as we could by seeing a bank cashier in another picture become the presi-

dent of the institution for which he works. Chico's one ambition was to become a street washer. He becomes one. His ambition is achieved, and if the story had been one of his ambition it could have ended happily when he received his appointment. The fault of most motion pictures is that they are not content with showing a reasonable achievement of an ambition. Given a picture in which the main interest centers around a bootblack's ambition to own the stand at which he works, the culmination of his dream is not considered to be sufficient; we must fade-out on the hero owning all the stands in the state and controlling all the factories that make shoeblacking. In *The Crowd* King Vidor made a masterly picture which faded out on the central character realizing an ambition for which he had struggled and suffered. He is shown as one of the crowd; he loses his job, and the chief interest of the picture is his struggle against adversity, which ends happily when he gets his job back. As Vidor shot it, it was a poignant and powerful picture, a tremendous one that would have made a deep impression on the public. I have seen it three times, but I have refrained from reviewing it until I see it in the form in which it is to be released. At the first showing it was a great picture; as I saw it the last time it was a poor one. It is a shame to watch the way it is being ruined through some supervisor's misconception of the public's taste. As Vidor finished it the audience would have been satisfied fully because the man got his job back, leaving it to presume that his struggles were over and that he would live happily ever after. The ending struck just the right note and left me under the spell of a great picture. I had been so interested in the man's struggles, his suffering had awakened my sympathy to such a degree that I sighed with relief when his employer reinstated him. At that time it was evident that Vidor had shot too much footage, for the strength of some of the sequences was sacrificed in bringing the whole picture within the required length, but, even so, it was a truly notable picture. I was appalled when I saw it the last time. Someone on the Metro lot—I can not believe it was Irving Thalberg—did not consider that Vidor's powerful ending had enough box-office appeal. Another was tacked on. It shows our hero living in a mansion paid for by the huge sums he received from writing advertising slogans. The whole idea of Vidor's conception is ruined. He made a great picture and it has become a blah one. To accommodate the added footage the cutting is so sharp that more sequences are harmed. Before we had properly developed causes and effects; now we have causes without the effects, and effects without the causes. It is deplorable that such inspired work as Vidor put into the picture originally had to be subjected to the manhandling of supervisors who could not understand what it was all about. This is not a review of *The Crowd*. I will review it after it comes off the operating table.

* * *

"The Crystal Cup" Is Not so Terrible

MOST of the reviews of *The Crystal Cup* that I have read criticized the story on the score that its premise was faulty, the contention being that the girl's hatred of men was unreasonable. Aren't all hatreds unreasonable? And can we account for hatreds? I hate lip-sticks, and I used to play golf at Coronado with a

A Woman Writes Me---

to the effect that as she is a screen writer she is anxious to do everything she can to make The Spectator a more powerful champion of the writers' interests, but she can't quite see how she can contribute to this by sending The Spectator a check for fifty dollars for ten subscriptions to be sent to exhibitors.

"What good will it do me or the exhibitors?" she writes. "A number of my friends who admire your paper greatly have asked me the same question."

My campaign for a large exhibitor circulation is not designed to do the exhibitors any good, so we may dismiss that part of the question, even though hundreds of letters that I have received during the last two months bear witness to the pleasure exhibitors derive from reading The Spectator.

I want exhibitor circulation for two reasons. One is that the revenue derived from it will help to offset the determined effort producers are making to put The Spectator out of business.

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No. 10

We offer directors a couple
of gold medals

Revolution impending in
Motion Picture Industry

A discussion of the use and
abuse of close-ups

Is a love story always neces-
sary in a picture?

HIS DOG
THE ENEMY
FAIR CO-ED
HER WILD OAT

GIRL FROM RIO
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He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill.—Burke.

HOLLYWOOD, CALIF., JANUARY 7, 1928

A COUPLE OF MEDALS

SCREEN art seems to be about at a standstill. Once in a long time we get a perfect picture like **Seventh Heaven**, but after it has been shown we can discover no evidence of its having had a beneficial effect on the art. The screen apparently profits nothing from either its faults or its virtues. Most of the pictures are love stories, which make the love scenes in them matters of greatest importance to them, yet how seldom we see on the screen a love scene that is not a duplicate of what we have seen in hundreds of other pictures. And how often do you see a final fade-out that looks as if any thought had been expended on it? To stimulate interest in these two important features of pictures, love scenes and fade-outs, I offer two gold medals, one to be presented to the director responsible for the best love scene shown on the screen during 1928, and the other to the director responsible for the most striking final fadeout during the same period. The only handicaps under which directors will work in striving for these recognitions of merit is that the love scenes and the fade-outs will have to please me personally, and I may have odd tastes. But I can not see how it can be avoided. I can not very well appoint a committee to tell me what love scene I admire most during the year. I must decide that for myself. Another handi-

THE NEXT SPECTATOR

A review of **Grandma Bernle Learns Her Letters**, a new Fox picture, directed by John Ford, a superb example of screen art, worthy of a place beside its great studio-mate, **Seventh Heaven**.

Reviews of several other pictures, among them **Chicago**, **The Noose**. **Under the Black Eagle**, **Mademoiselle from Armentieres**, **Finders Keepers**, **High School Hero**, **Lady of Victories**.

A discussion of economy in production.

The editor is offered a job, but before accepting it he would have to kill **The Spectator**.

Comments on topics of interest to picture people.

cap is that I must see the love scene, and I do not see all the pictures that are made. The only way to get around that is for directors to inform me when they have made love scenes and fade-outs that they desire me to consider. I am aware, too, that a love scene or a fade-out that I admire when I see it on the screen may have been written into the script exactly as it is shot, which would entitle the writer of the script to all the credit for its originality, but if I go beyond the director in an effort to discover to whom belongs the credit I am liable to start a lot of rows, and awarding the prizes would amount to settling disputes. I am not offering myself in the capacity of a referee, consequently I will award the medals to directors and allow them to fight it out with the script writers. My statement that I must select the prize winners myself does not mean that I will not value the assistance of readers of **The Spectator** in making the selections. I want such assistance. When you see a love scene or a final fade-out whose originality impresses you write me about it and tell me why you like it. If you do not, I may miss it. My only reason for offering the medals is my hope that they may lead to the improvement of pictures. I believe that at present too much attention is given to pictures as a whole and too little to their individual features. Love scenes are important, but, as I have said already, I can see no evidence of the expenditure of thought on them. They have become standardized, as have final fade-outs. I believe the responsibility for this rests with directors, therefore to them I offer:

The Film Spectator Gold Medal for the most original and most romantic love scene shown on the screen during 1928.

The Film Spectator Gold Medal for the most original and most appropriate final fade-out shown on the screen during 1928.

WHEN?

By GEORGE F. MAGOFFIN

There is one best way to present a thought,
Whether on paper or on the screen,
That those who see or hear may be impressed
By that thought's message,
May grasp its full import and realize
Its concrete substance.
"Thoughts are things," not vapid whisperings.
They come from whence? No man may know;
But they have power to damn or bless,
To gladden by some fragrance saved from long ago,
Or wither, by their sere unfruitfulness.
The one best way! O, genius, where art thou
That pictured thoughts so fail to realize their end?
Great scenes fall flat. A withered bough,
Creaking in Autumn's wind, has more of drama,
More of that which wakes response within the heart
Than labored sequence, costly sets and all the panoplied array
In the noble garm, commercialized, of Art.
Of unessential junk, that masquerades, and cloaks its motley

for something to put into it. It is a poor picture because it is true to no form. The bathtub scene, so successful in the Lubitsch production, hurts the comedy-drama because it is an alien quantity in the latter. When we have all our pictures made by people who understand thoroughly what screen art is, I will be able to satisfy my correspondent by classifying them. That will not be until we have rid ourselves of the supervisors who now make it impossible for the art to advance. It is at a standstill because the producers who dominate it know nothing whatever about it and have selected as their lieutenants people who know no more.

* * *

Going Right Ahead After a Picture Ends

THE obsession that the love story is the major interest in every picture often is responsible for pictures being ruined, or nearly so. In *His Dog* we have an example of it in a little, intimate story. In *The Enemy* we have a big story with a powerful theme laboring under the same disadvantage. Lillian Gish stars in *The Enemy* under the direction of Fred Niblo. It is a war story which Niblo handles with a breadth of understanding and a convincing sweep that makes it rank as perhaps his greatest contribution to the screen. The picture is an indictment of war, the most powerful indictment that I yet have seen screened. In its early sequences it plants the happiness of the home in which Miss Gish lives with her grandfather, Frank Currier, a college professor. She is engaged to Ralph Forbes. John Peters and Fritzi Ridgeway, man and wife, are friends of Lillian, and Ralph Emerson, an Englishman, is a college chum of Forbes. The war breaks out and the picture deals with its effect on the fortunes of those in whom the first couple of reels make us interested. George Fawcett, father of Forbes, becomes a profiteer and lives on the fat of the land, while a baby born to the union of Forbes and Lillian is undernourished. Word comes that Peters has been killed, and his widow, rather than allow her child to starve, makes money to support it in the one sure way that always is open to attractive young women. To save the life of her baby Lillian follows the example of Fritzi. We see her take off her wedding ring and, dressed in her best, enter a cafe frequented by men looking for women. From a close-up of wine being poured into a glass there is a dissolve to milk being poured into a nursing bottle, followed by a medium shot showing Lillian giving her baby the bottle. It is a magnificent bit of direction to put over something that required delicate handling. The irony of Lillian's sacrifice is that immediately following it, George Fawcett, her father-in-law, relents of his neglect of her and provides relief that coming twenty-four hours earlier would have made the tragedy of her sacrifice unnecessary. But fate has not dealt all its blows. In quick succession come news of the death of Lillian's husband and the death of her baby. Lillian's reaction to these overwhelming tragedies is shown in the greatest scene she ever has contributed to the screen. All through the picture we almost can hear the rhythmic beat of marching feet as more men march to be sacrificed to the god of war, and in her big scene Lillian gives physical expression to her emotions to the same relentless rhythm. It is superb acting. The war ends, and we see George Fawcett, the profiteer, receiving a decoration for meritorious service as a citizen.

The story ends there. With magnificent strokes Niblo has drawn a picture of the insanity of war, and up to this point has given us a film that will attract the attention of the world, and which reflects the highest credit on those in the Metro organization who had anything to do with its making. But the picture goes on after the story ends. To impress its lesson on the viewer it kills Forbes, but for what Metro regards as the interest of the box-office, it brings him back to life in the last reel. The people who are equipped with mentalities that would make them appreciate the impressive manner in which Niblo has handled the main theme can feel only that the ending is ridiculous and totally illogical, while those whose mentalities are weak enough to demand the happy ending could not possibly enjoy the high degree of intelligence that the rest of the picture reflects. If this reasoning be sound it would appear that Metro did its best to provide against the picture being wholly satisfying to anyone. If Galli Curci sang an inspiring aria and followed it with a clog dance the whole performance would be no more ridiculous than the happy ending tacked on to it makes *The Enemy*.

* * *

Niblo Does Some Great Directing

MAKING motion pictures is a business that, like all other businesses, has as its main object the earning of profits. It earns its money by selling works of art. It would seem that the more merit there is in the works of art the greater money they should earn. I don't see how anyone can quarrel with that on the ground that it is not economically sound reasoning. The lowbrows who control pictures laugh at you when you mention screen art. They tell you it is purely a business to get money, and then they proceed to spend money unnecessarily to put handicaps on the earning power of their products. It is word-of-mouth advertising that creates the profits. Highbrows will condemn *The Enemy* for its lowbrow ending and lowbrows will condemn it for its highbrow beginning, so where is the picture to get its word-of-mouth advertising? But even with the manhandling that ignorant supervision gave it, *The Enemy* is a picture that you must see. There are many shots in it which indicate that Niblo is a student of foreign technic, and its freedom from close-ups would indicate that he is a reader of *The Spectator*, which, incidentally, he has been since its first number. He opens the picture with a succession of dissolves which effectively plant its atmosphere, and then with incident and symbolism he tells his story rapidly but clearly. Newspaper headings superimposed on the whirring wheels of a multiple press tell graphically the sweep of the world war, and marching columns under different flags give pictorial expression to what the newspapers imply. Some of his intimate scenes are beautiful and touching, splendid examples of intelligent direction. The wedding of Miss Gish and Forbes is one of the high spots of the picture. It is a superb bit of simplicity in a majestic setting. A splendid touch is Forbes' attempt, as he walks down the aisle of the cathedral, to keep in step with the martial music that bands are playing for marching soldiers on the streets outside. The film is full of such masterly touches, there being more of them than I have seen in any other picture that Niblo has made. Most effectively, and in many ways, he introduces the personal equation into the

his atmosphere splendidly, and maintains it effectively. The fact that there are but few individual close-ups in the picture is a feature that appeals to me. In fact, I can recall no other picture except Sunrise, in which close-ups are treated with as much intelligence. Julian never divides two characters in a scene to show each in a separate close-up. When two people are conversing and a close-up is desirable, he brings both of them into the shot which is half way between a close-up and a medium shot. Only when two characters are at a distance from each other and are facing each other does he show either of them in an individual closeup which, I maintain, is the proper way to treat close-ups. When two men come to the opposite ends of a room and stare at one another it is permissible to show each of them in a large close-up, for it obviously is impossible to register their expressions in a shot long enough to include them when they are so far apart; but when they draw together in the middle of the room and indulge in conversation there is no excuse whatever for giving each an individual close-up. In his direction Julian shows that he agrees with this view. The Leopard Woman adds to my growing conviction that Alan Hale is one of the very best actors we have. In this picture he is a gay villain—it's a mystery picture and I can't tell you too much about it—and is quite the most engaging villain I've seen for a long time. Hale brings real intelligence to play in the way he handles a role. His acting in this latest Julian picture marks a departure in the enactment of heavy roles. At no moment is he inspired by a worthy motive, but never for an instance is he anything but a cheerful, grinning, lovable rogue. He loses out in the end, of course, but he goes down cheer-

fully, the winning smile still on his face. He gives a really magnificent performance. Jacqueline Logan plays the name role. She is fearless among her leopards and makes a fine figure of a circus performer, but with such strong competition as Hale provides it is hard for her to register strongly with her acting. Robert Armstrong plays opposite her, a small part, but he does it well. No exhibitor need hesitate about buying The Leopard Woman.

* * *

Eating Is Poor Screen Material

JAMES Bradbury is a detective in The Leopard Woman. The script called for him to eat peanuts in his scenes. I suppose in an effort to give him personality. That is all right in theory, but let us see how it works out. I suppose on the set Jim ate peanuts only when he was before the camera, consequently none of those on the set with him received the impression that he was eating many, for most of the time he was eating none. But what about the picture? Every moment he is on the screen he is eating the gubbers. There is not one moment when his jaws are not working. We have a right to assume, therefore, that Bradbury, the detective, not the motion picture actor, ate peanuts all the time, that from morning to night they were his constant diet, for it is not reasonable to presume that he ate them only when working on the case we are interested in, and at no other time. But during all his waking hours he could not maintain the rate of consumption he establishes during the short time we see him. We know he must have his off moments, even though the picture seems to strive to prove that his faithfulness to his

W. R. WILKERSON

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artists, directors and writers.*



GRanite 4553

Barbed Wire

D i r e c t e d B y
ROWLAND V. LEE

FLESH *and the* DEVIL

—on The Spectator's list of Ten Best Pictures.

Directed by
CLARENCE BROWN

Just Completed
"The Trail of '98"

NORMA TALMADGE

IN

CAMILLE

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DIRECTED BY

FRED NIBLO

In Production—Ronald Colman and Vilma Banky in

LEATHER FACE

By SAMUEL GOLDWYN

LLOYD NOSLER

Film Editor

FLESH *and the* DEVIL

Uncle Tom's Cabin
Cat and Canary
Ben-Hur

SEVENTH HEAVEN
RESURRECTION
FLESH AND THE DEVIL

White Gold

WILD GEESE
BARBED WIRE
CAMILLE
MY BEST GIRL
THE SYMPHONY
THE GAUCHO

WM. K. HOWARD

Director of
WHITE GOLD

JOHN FARROW

Titled

White Gold

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TOWARD THE MOON

An Original for DE MILLE

TAY GARNETT

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White Gold

In Collaboration with

GARRETT FORT

KENNETH THOMPSON

Male Lead in

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SAM TAYLOR

Director of
MY BEST GIRL

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10 Best Pictures of the Year



Now Directing
THE TEMPEST

JOHN BARRYMORE
Starring
For United Artists

MARY PICKFORD

in

My Best Girl

Directed by
SAM TAYLOR



Screen Play by
TIM WHELAN

In Collaboration With
ALLAN McNEIL

CHAS. ROSHER

CINEMATOGRAPHER

My Best Girl

On The Spectator's List of
10 Best Pictures of the Year

Now Photographing the
United Artists Production

The Tempest

Starring
JOHN BARRYMORE

GUSTAV VON SEYFFERTITZ

The Neighbor in Barbed Wire
The Dictator in The Gaucho



Both Productions on Welford Beaton's
Ten Best Pictures of the Year

WILD GEESE

—a TIFFANY production on Welford Beaton's list of Ten Best Pictures in 1927.

Directed by

PHIL STONE

NORMA TALMADGE
IN
CAMILLE



HAL KERN
FILM EDITOR

Now in Seventh Year as Film Editor for All
Joseph M. Schenck Productions

FINIS FOX

Wrote the Screen Story of

“RESURRECTION”

Listed by Welford Beaton as One of the
Best 10 Pictures of 1927

EDWIN CAREWE

CO-PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR
of

“RESURRECTION”

Listed by Welford Beaton as One of the
Best 10 Pictures of 1927

The Gaucho

On The Spectator's list of ten best pictures of the year.



TONY GAUDIO

Cinematographer, now photographing
"Hell's Angels"
For CADDO Productions

The Symphony

Supervised by

PAUL KOHNER

Now Supervising

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

Starring

CONRAD VEIDT

A Universal Super-Jewel

SYMPHONY

A Universal Picture selected by The Spectator as one of the ten best of last year.

Story by

SVEND GADE

Author of Grease Paint, Conrade Veidt's next starring vehicle

ADAPTATION *and* CONTINUITY

by

Charles Kenyon



SYMPHONY



THE FOREIGN LEGION



In Preparation:

SHOW BOAT

EDWARD LEVEQUE
The Spectator and Motion
Picture Producers

How Universal treats one of
its young players

EDWARD LEVEQUE
The Editor is offered a good job
if he'll abandon Spectator

Fox makes truly great picture in
"Grandma Bernle"

CHICAGO

LADY OF VICTORIES

SKINNER'S BIG IDEA

UNDER THE BLACK EAGLE

THE NOOSE

FINDERS KEEPERS

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MAN, WOMAN, AND SIN

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JOHN FARROW
WRITER
DE MILLE STUDIO



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FILM SPECTATOR

Published In Hollywood Every Other Saturday

Vol. 4

Hollywood, California, February 4, 1928

No. 12

Arthur Lake Case has some
Comedy Relief

Academy contract a raw deal
for free lances

Executives responsible for big
waste of money

Inevitable that speaking films
will be general

Some silly habits the screen
should outgrow

JAZZ SINGER
LAST COMMAND
FLYING ROMEO'S

GET YOUR MAN
QUALITY STREET
WE'RE IN THE AIR

Shutting down studios foolish
business move

Producers do not cultivate loyalty
of employees

Our compliments to the Fox
organization

Is art of acting coming into
its own?

Reviews by the Editor

PATENT LEATHER KID
SORRELL AND SON
SADIE THOMPSON
DRUMS OF LOVE

NO PLACE TO GO
FEEL MY PULSE
DOOMSDAY
GORILLA

Reviews by Donald Beaton

HER WILD OAT
SADIE THOMPSON
SORRELL AND SON

ON YOUR TOES
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JOSEPH JACKSON
Originals - Adaptations - Titles
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AT FIRST NATIONAL

I see by a New York paper that
AL COHN
is writing an adaptation of The Butter and Egg Man. Don't know anything about it myself.

PAUL SCHOFIELD
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TITLES by
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HOLLYWOOD

PAUL KOHNER
Production Supervisor for Universal

"THE MAN WHO LAUGHS"
—a Paul Leni Production,
Starring Mary Philbin-Conrad Veidt.

CHARLES KENYON
SCENARIST

(C23111)

UNIVERSAL

JOHN FARROW
WRITER
WITH PARAMOUNT

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for them again after the hiatus, is a piece of idiocy, colossal and sublime. Apparently the Warner boys consider that their office fixtures constitute their organization and that if they can keep them intact they can operate efficiently simply by getting someone to sit in front of each desk. Only by possessing a closely knit, efficient and permanent organization can any company earn its potential profit. At no time can anyone working for Warner Brothers feel himself secure in his position, and it is upon a foundation of a feeling of security that efficiency and loyalty can be built. Universal is about as bad as Warner Brothers. For the past couple of years I have watched with interest the growth of a healthy feeling on the Universal lot. Henry Henigson, the general manager, had performed the miracle of ridding the lot of its continual mental turmoil, something that Carl Laemmle seems to have an uncanny knack for creating, and for the first time in the history of the company those who worked for it were giving more attention to the performance of their duties than to the holding of their jobs. Then along came an announcement that the studio was to close for a period, and as I write this no one on the lot is sure of his job. If the business of the company were pounding big rocks until they became little ones, there would be nothing serious in the perturbation of its employees, for a man can pound a rock while his mind is in a turmoil, but to disturb the mental state of people doing mental work is about as insane a thing as an employer can do. On all the other lots the feeling is little better than it is in the Warner and Universal studios. I can not find any organization that radiates an atmosphere of stability. The De Mille lot perhaps comes closest to it, and Watterson Rothacker has introduced a healthier feeling into the First National organization, but on all the other lots everyone seems more concerned with his next job than with the one he is holding. A condition that is both an artistic and an economic drawback to the screen is the lack in all the studios of a feeling of personal loyalty to the men who direct their affairs. At recurrent intervals a feeling of loyalty to Carl Laemmle demonstrates itself on the Universal lot, but before it reaches full bloom something happens to dispel it. Laemmle himself has the quality that would command personal loyalty, but those who advise him do such fool things that it is impossible for him to keep it after he has earned it. The growing consciousness on the Fox lot that it is turning out a series of the greatest pictures ever made in so short a time by any producing organization is engendering a respect for Winfield Sheehan that should develop into a feeling of personal loyalty so strong as to become a valuable asset of the firm. Some years ago Jesse Lasky was in close touch with his employees and they had a feeling of loyalty to him, but the organization has become so great that it has grown away from him and now he virtually is a stranger on the lot. Any man in any industry gets the popularity and loyalty that he earns. It is the fault of the producers themselves that their employees are interested only in themselves, and not in the welfare of the companies that employ them. The bosses are responsible for the distressing condition of the morale. On all the lots money is wasted on a gigantic scale, and the only remedy that the composite producer mind has evolved yet is that the salaries of actors, directors, and writers should be reduced, even though none of the three contributes anything material to the waste.

My Compliments to the Fox Organization

WHAT Price Glory?, Seventh Heaven, Sunrise, Four Sons, The Street Angel, Mother Machree—all among the greatest pictures ever made, and all from the same studio. Hangman's House, The Four Devils and other equally notable ones to come from the same studio, the works of such great directors as Frank Borzage, Jack Ford, and F. W. Murnau. Contemplating such a list of screen triumphs we must credit the Fox production organization with being the most efficient on earth. During the time it took to make these pictures all the other organizations combined did not make such contributions to screen art. I have criticized the Fox organization as a whole and Winfield Sheehan, its head, severely, and I do not retract anything I have said, but I admit that the organization is an amazingly capable one and that Sheehan is the greatest producer in the world. No other conclusion can be drawn. Sheehan is a great producer because he is a great business man. Last summer, when the other studios were demoralizing their morale by cutting salaries in a crazy manner, Sheehan went straight ahead, adding nothing to the turmoil and buying up the brains that the other producers drove from their studios. The result has been a procession of the greatest pictures ever made. While these pictures were appearing, came news of the acquisition by Fox of West Coast Theatres, which gives him control of over five hundred houses, adding to the lustre of being the greatest producer, the distinction of being the greatest exhibitor. Extraordinary as these achievements are, the Fox organization seems just to have started. Even more extraordinary things are planned by Fox and Sheehan. They are young yet, Fox being forty-seven and Sheehan forty-four, and while I know the latter only slightly and the former not at all, I would judge by their accomplishments that they are daring men with the saving grace of caution. How far are they going? On past performances it seems safe to predict that in an astonishingly short time the Fox organization as a producer of motion pictures will be the greatest in point of quantity as it is now in point of quality. The company is founded on a policy that makes expansion automatic. Eighty-five per cent of the profit it makes on pictures this year will be put back into pictures next year. This means that next year Fox will spend on the production of pictures as much money as he spends this year, plus eighty-five per cent of the profits made by the pictures shown this year. When you consider the tremendous money-makers that just have been released, and the others that are to be released, you can get some idea of the great sum that automatically will become available for production on an ascending scale during each succeeding year. The healthy feature of the company's operations is that it considers itself only a producer of pictures, and not primarily an exhibitor. This means that production will be its first thought, which, in turn, means that the procession of Seventh Heaven and such pictures will be unending. Fox eventually will pass Paramount and Metro, for the major concern of these two companies is their theatre investment, which Fox regards as of secondary importance, notwithstanding its gigantic proportions. And Fox is keeping abreast of screen development. The other night I sat for two hours in a projection room and viewed the marvels of

Movietone. It is another thing that Fox just has started. Where are he and Sheehan going, anyway? A few years ago I stood jammed in a crowd at Buckingham Palace, London, endeavoring to watch the colorful change of guard. My view of it was limited. In the projection room in Hollywood I sat in a comfortable easy chair and saw the whole thing, and heard the music of the band. What other miracles is this organization going to perform?

* * *

Something About the Art of Acting

HAVING passed through almost every other phase, we can look forward with confidence to the screen finally achieving the acting phase. It is a desire to be entertained that takes people to picture houses. It does not matter to them in what form the entertainment comes to them. A good story will entertain them, and good acting will do the same. To advance our argument let us suppose that the thoroughly entertaining picture is made up of fifty per cent story and fifty per cent acting. The audience thereby receives one hundred per cent entertainment, which is what it wants and what the producer must provide. If the story be a weak one that would be but forty per cent of a picture, obviously it is up to the producer to provide sixty per cent of acting to make up the deficit and to keep the picture up to one hundred per cent. The weaker the story, the stronger must be the acting, and, fortunately, there is enough acting ability in Hollywood to bolster up the weakest story. The trouble at present is that not enough attention is paid to performances. Producers evince a greater desire to secure cheap actors than good ones, although there are plenty of good actors who can be secured for reasonable salaries. Another weakness is that actors are not studied sufficiently by directors. We have the actor whose hands are expressive; another who can put over something best by his facial expression; a third who can do his best work with his whole body, yet the tendency is to make all three of them conform to the director's conception of a certain scene. Close-ups are given of all three, while the only one who should be shown in one is he whose facial expression is his strongest point. Let us suppose that we have in the same cast Lon Chaney, Percy Marmont, Henry B. Walthall, Adolphe Menjou and Charlie Ray. If I were directing the picture I would let Lon Chaney put over his big moments with his face and eyes. Quite often I would shoot Adolphe's back and allow him to use his expressive shoulders, but I would not overlook his eyebrow raising. I would not show Walthall in any close-up that cut out his hands. Take Henry's hands away from him and you rob him of his most effective means of expression. Every shot of Marmont would include his whole body. Percy is restricted somewhat in facial expression, but he has the most expressive body on the screen. I would allow Charlie Ray to use his feet in his big moments. He can twist his toes and say as much with them as Lon Chaney can with his face. Emil Jannings is a wonderful actor because he is equally eloquent with his face, hands, legs, and back. He has a marvelously expressive carriage, and in his case I probably would not shoot one close-up. Jean Hersholt is the one actor who defies analysis. He is such a perfect master of his art that he, as an individual, has no screen personality. He is always the character, never Jean Hersholt, which makes

him the greatest screen actor we have. John Barrymore and Emil Jannings are as perfect as Jean with the mechanics of their work, but when they are on the screen we always can see the actors shining through their art, while with Hersholt there is nothing to remind us that we are looking at an actor. If Hersholt were a better business man he would not be such a good actor. He has carried his art past the public's ability to appreciate it. Barrymore and Jannings always will earn more money than Jean will because the public wants to know that it is paying to see acting, and apparently he never acts. Another weakness in our way of handling acting is the failure to realize what each good actor is adapted to best. Take as an example Alan Hale. I never have seen him as anything except a heavy, yet I have convinced myself that he is one of the most talented comedians we have. A spirit of fun, of reckless devilment, is so apparent in every part he plays that I can not understand why some producer does not recognize it and give him an opportunity to play the sort of role in which he is so successful. He is a good heavy because he is a good actor, but he would be a better comedian.

* * *

Gloria Comes Back in "Sadie Thompson"

AS a parting shot, in dismissing *The Loves of Carmen* as a topic to write about, I stated that I hoped I never would see another picture directed by Raoul Walsh. In that picture he displayed a depravity that was nauseating, and in *What Price Glory?* he presented eating scenes that were the last word in vulgarity. I was thinking of these pictures when I expressed the hope that I never would see any more of his work on the screen. It was a wish that apparently I could not keep. I have seen *Sadie Thompson*. Walsh not only directed it, but he is the leading man in it. And I believe that it will be on my list of ten best pictures for this year. It is Gloria Swanson's supreme screen effort, and it will be considered as Walsh's most notable contribution to the screen, with the possible exception of *What Price Glory?* Despite the fact that the picture is made from the play *Rain*, something that dirty-minded people condemn as being unclean, and was entrusted to a director who revels in smut, there is not a foot of vulgarity in the entire nine reels. It is an amazing example of editing. Many scenes as bad as those I have condemned in other Walsh pictures, were shot during the making of *Sadie Thompson*, but they do not appear on the screen. Dismissing all his other pictures, and confining our attention to what we see on the screen in *Sadie*, we have to admit that Walsh is a talented director and an excellent actor. He has given us a great picture which brings Gloria back with a bang. Her performance is magnificent. It is the most arresting feature of a production that is notable for several things. Those who have seen or read the play will be interested in the manner in which it has been transferred to the screen to keep from offending bone-headed censors. It was done simply: the hypocritical preacher of the play is a hypocritical layman in the picture. I do not see what divinity it is that surrounds preachers to keep us from discussing them frankly on the screen, but as they compose a most uninteresting class of people who are doomed to extinction as the world thinks more clearly, I view with amusement

the elimination from Sadie Thompson of the collar that buttons behind, and can not see that it has any blighting effect on the picture as a dramatic work. Somerset Maugham's story gets all the credit and John Colton's masterly play is ignored on the screen, which also is all right with me, although I think it is a shabby trick to play on John. Walsh is credited with the adaptation. It is a notable piece of screen writing, and increases my re-awakened admiration for Walsh. I would advise him to continue to go straight. He shows such admirable talent in each phase of his three-fold connection with this picture that it is a pity that he ever prostitutes such talent to the depiction of scenes that are more disgusting than artistic. It is a queer thing that he takes such a colorful story as Carmen and makes it revolting on the screen, then follows it with a sordid story like Rain and makes a great, clean drama of it. His adaptation and direction reveal in a remarkable way that anything can be put on the screen, provided it be done properly. I hope that when some of the narrow-minded censors turn their narrow eyes on it, they will be able to see themselves in Lionel Barrymore's characterization of the reformer. It is such a powerful characterization that it makes of the picture an indictment of reformers in general. It is not so much a treatise on morality as it is a sweeping denunciation of the sharp-nosed hypocrites who infest the earth to its detriment. Sadie is pure, but loud, as far as we can judge from the picture. Purity is an attribute that it is a woman's prerogative to cherish or abuse, while loudness is unforgivable, and about the only thing in the picture for which we can condemn Sadie is that she chews gum.

* * *

Fine Performances Mark Production

PASSING from the mental gymnastics performed so nimbly to make Rain screen fodder for our youth, and considering it solely as a motion picture, we find it a screen masterpiece whose faults are not those of direction, acting or production. I remarked in the previous paragraph that it is an amazing example of editing to preserve its cleanliness, but in avoiding the muddy places it committed other faults that deny it perfection in my estimation, but my objections may be purely personal and perhaps will not be shared by those who see the picture. First, however, I would like to extend my respects to Gloria's performance, which I already have said is the greatest of her career. Her part is one that could be done justice only by an accomplished actress. Not once while viewing the unsatisfactory pictures in which she appeared with so much damage to her box-office strength, did I lose my faith in Miss Swanson's standing as an artist. I always believed her to be a splendid actress and in Sadie Thompson she is just that. From her lighter moments when she rollicks with the marines, to the great one in which she indulges in a wild outburst of invective that makes the reformer cringe, and then on to the despair that grips her towards the end of the picture, Gloria pursues a path set with gems of cinematic art. This picture will prove the soundness of an argument I advanced a year or so ago: that no one who has been a great box-office attraction is lost so hopelessly that he can not be brought back if he be given pictures equal in merit to those upon which his reputation was built. If Gloria be fortunate enough to

follow Sadie Thompson with something as good she will again be as near the top of the list as she ever was. To Lionel Barrymore will go a large share of the credit for the excellence of Sadie. In a masterly manner he shows us just what a nasty reptile a professional reformer can be. I have to smile now as I reflect how violently he made me hate him while viewing the picture. It is seldom that a heavy carries me past the point of admiring his performance, but Lionel made me forget his acting and awakened in me a feeling of strong hatred, which the large preview audience gave evidence of sharing cordially. I can not recall having seen Raoul Walsh as an actor in any previous picture. He is perfect in this one. James Marcus also appears to good advantage. All the acting is directed intelligently. There is considerable repression, but not enough to stifle expression. Walsh makes each of his characters, including himself, entirely human. Gloria is the only one in the cast who breaks loose, and she is the only one who would. In the first reel or two the picture is cut too sharply, something probably made necessary by over-shooting. When too many scenes are shot, too short pieces of them have to be inserted to carry the story, which makes the film jumpy when it reaches the public. The greatest fault of the editing is towards the end of the picture. We see all the characters reacting to some stupendous piece of news. There is great excitement; people run hither and yon; A tells B what all the fuss is about, and B adds to it—and the audience hasn't the remotest idea what has happened. It sees the reformer's wife enacting a scene, but it can not appraise her emotional portrayal because it doesn't know what she is portraying. By the time the audience is exasperated thoroughly a title explains that the reformer has killed himself. Had such a title opened the sequence, the audience would have been in a position to appreciate the manner in which it was directed and acted. The titles are another weakness of Sadie Thompson. The first one is a silly wisecrack and but few of the other narrative titles are in keeping with the spirit of the picture as a dignified piece of screen drama. They are as childish as the editing of the suicide sequence. They are punctuated in a manner that is a disgrace to such a great organization as United Artists. No person with knowledge of the manner in which the English language should be presented will accept Sadie Thompson altogether seriously.

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"Patent Leather Kid" Is a Notable Picture

THE Patent Leather Kid is a great motion picture. It has everything—an entertaining and engrossing story, fine acting, intelligent direction, and an elaborate story. Its war sequences have not been excelled in any picture, not even in The Big Parade. The performance of Richard Barthelmess will rank among the best of the year. It is a revolutionary characterization for a hero. Dick plays a sleek looking, lowbrow prizefighter. During the entire eleven reels of the picture he does not perform one gracious act. He knocks out the girl he loves, rows with his manager, without provocation insults a man who is attentive to the girl, tries to dodge the draft, and shows a yellow streak when he reaches the trenches. He is an ungracious boor to the end, and even when he becomes heroic finally when under fire he performs a feat that

makes us admire him, but not like him. But in spite of everything, Dick makes the part a sympathetic one simply because he is a superb actor. He puts over the point of view of the unlikable character; makes us see the mental process back of each action of the prizefighter, and because we know him we excuse his actions as being something consistent with his character. He interests us, therefore we follow his affairs with sympathy and wish him well, although we would not ask him to dine with us. It is a part that calls for a wide range of acting, and Barthelmess is equal to all its demands. To me Dick is one of the most appealing actors on the screen, and always has been since I first saw him in a picture. As the prizefighter and later as the soldier he does some of the best work of his career. This picture and *The Noose* following one another so closely will reestablish him as a box-office asset. Hollywood is going to like Molly O'Day as the girl in *The Patent Leather Kid*. Her performance at times reaches heights that we might expect only from a Lillian Gish. Her characterization is consistent. She is planted as a hard boiled East Sider, and when she discovers Dick in a dressing station behind the lines, so badly wounded that he is not expected to live, she goes to pieces exactly as a girl of her origin would. Some of the Eastern reviewers have criticized her enactment of this scene, claiming that she over-acts it, but I do not agree with them. Molly O'Day is not going to get by on her looks as she unfortunately possesses an unattractive mouth, but she is going to be recognized as an actress of ability if she develops no temperament and attends strictly to business. An interesting characterization is contributed by Lawford Davidson. He rates in the picture as a heavy as he is antagonistic to the hero throughout, yet he is the gentleman at all times and does nothing that a gentleman should not do. In every encounter between him and Barthelmess Dick is in the wrong, a reversal of the standard treatment of hero and heavy. Davidson gives an excellent performance, and so does Arthur Stone. It is the first time I have seen Stone in a part that does his ability justice. His fondness for Dick is the keynote of his role and is portrayed with feeling and understanding. Matthew Betz is another who contributes to the wealth of excellent acting. As the domineering manager of the prizefighter he is splendid. Raymond Turner, a colored actor with more mouth than one person should have, has a screen personality that radiates joy, and uses it effectively to produce laughs. In such a big production there are many small parts and each of them is handled adequately. The cordial welcome that *The Patent Leather Kid* has been given wherever it has been shown demonstrates that the public appreciates good acting. It is not all Barthelmess'. It is a convincing picture because every foot of acting in it is convincing. The policy of placing the chief burden of a picture on the star because he gets the most money is not sound economic reasoning. The more money that he gets the more there should be spent on the cast that surrounds him. *The Patent Leather Kid* is making a lot of money, not because the star gives a good performance, but because every performance in it is good.

Alfred Santell's Direction Splendid

LACKING a card index of past screen occurrences and possessing a mind that dismisses a picture as soon as its review is written, I have small standing as a historian, but I do not believe that Alfred Santell's name has been connected with any previous picture that would prepare us for the masterly direction he has given *The Patent Leather Kid*. Excepting too many close-ups, which we have grown to regard as stoically as we do the thorns on roses without deeming them detrimental to either the bloom or perfume, there is nothing in the direction to prompt anything but praise. The atmosphere of all the episodes is maintained admirably. It makes intimate scenes more convincing, and the war scenes terrific in their drama. There are two prizefights and each is handled in a way that brings out all its realism. In the second the hero is knocked out, and at the end of the picture we are spared a shot of him regaining his lost laurels. One of the notable things that Santell does is to create his comedy out of story material as he goes along. I was alone in a projection room when I saw the picture, consequently I do not know how many laughs it will provoke, but I would judge that there will be enough to give it some standing as a comedy. And everything that will cause a laugh is part of the story or assists in a characterization. The manner in which Barthelmess is introduced also is a refreshing departure. A short time ago I stated in *The Spectator* that the lead in a picture should not be introduced before he comes into the story, even if he were in earlier scenes. In this picture, made before my comments appeared, Dick is introduced in the manner I suggested. We first see him in a dressing room, first with his back to the camera, and later moving about among his handlers. He leaves with them for the ring and is introduced when he pauses to survey the crowd, the first time there was any excuse for giving him a close-up. Good direction. In some places Santell shows a disposition to get away from the conventional close-up treatment, using long shots and medium shots effectively, but on the whole there are too many close-ups for which there is no excuse. In one of them in an effort to get the heads as large as possible Barthelmess and Davidson, his captain, stand so closely together that they almost rub noses. You see the same idiotic thing in many pictures. It always makes me wonder if one of the actors had eaten onions or garlic before the scene was shot. But some of the close-ups are strong in drama, particularly one showing Dick in his transition from cowardice to bravery. It is excellent acting, and the close-up is justified, as is also a series of them showing Molly O'Day when she discovers Dick in the hospital. The war scenes were staged on a gigantic scale and in themselves would make any picture an outstanding one. His handling of them reveals Santell as a director with imagination and daring, as well as a keen sense of drama. In the New York sequences the personal element is planted so strongly that it persists throughout the war sequences, robbing them of any appearance of having been dragged in for their production value, as they were in *Seventh Heaven* and in practically all the other war pictures. In *The Patent Leather Kid* the girl is kept in the story by the conventional method of making her a nurse behind the lines. *Seventh Heaven* is the only picture that successfully avoided this device.

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